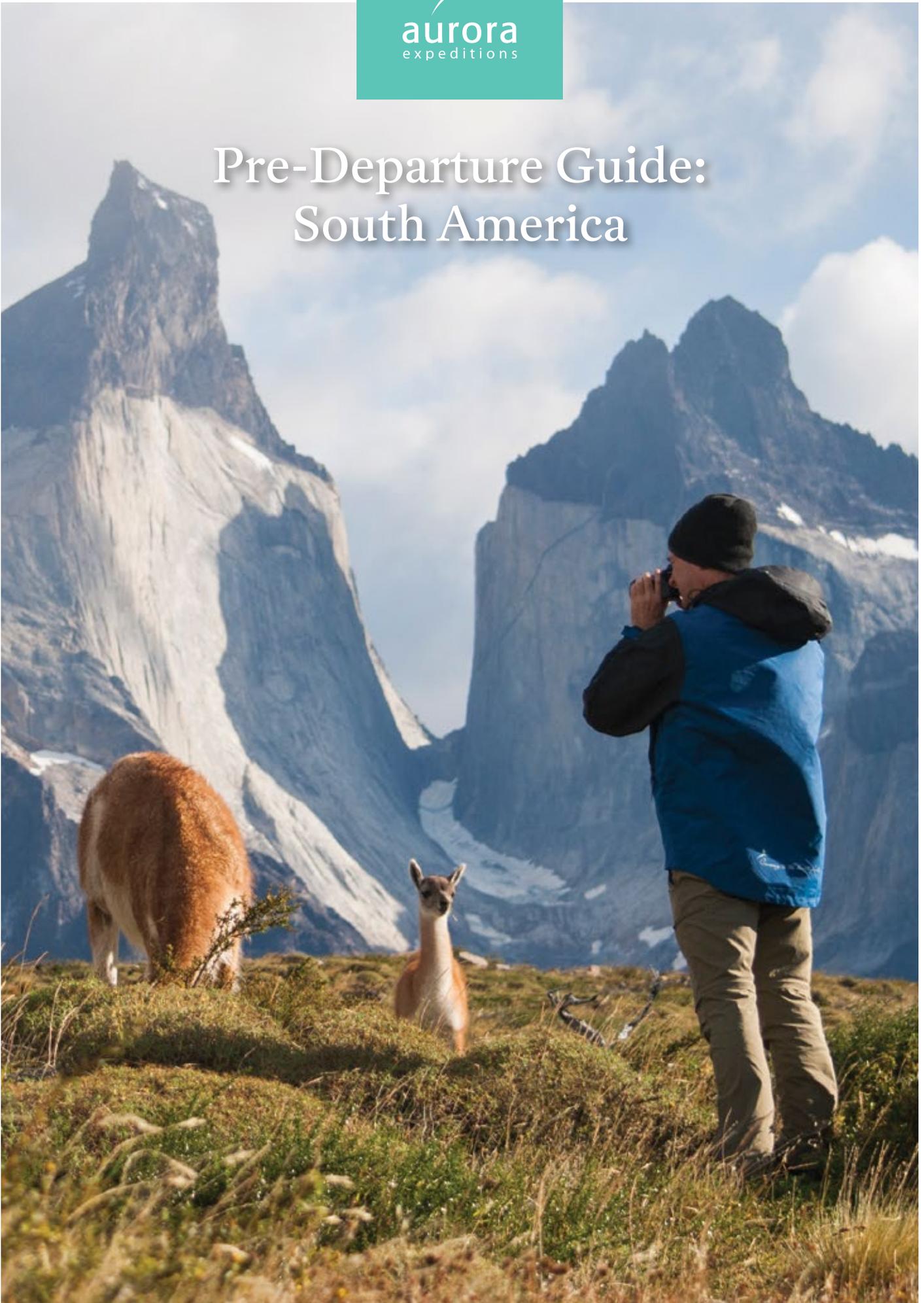


# Pre-Departure Guide: South America



# South America Pre-Departure Guide

## Welcome to South America

Thank you for choosing to travel with Aurora Expeditions, we hope you are as excited about your trip as we are!

Aurora Expeditions has prepared this guide containing some important information, hints and reminders to help you best prepare for your travels in South America.

This guide includes information from the climate and weather to the visa requirements, local currency, health and safety, and even shopping tips.

The South American continent is synonymous with adventure travel. Comprising 12 countries, nine of which share a common language – Spanish, South America offers incredible diversity in culture, geography, nature and wildlife. For an unforgettable travel experience, you can't get much better than a holiday in South America.

Home to some of the world's most iconic sites, diverse and exotic wildlife, jaw-dropping scenery, bustling cosmopolitan cities, fascinating mix of cultures and people, you'll be sure to have experiences to last a lifetime.

## Sustainable Tourism

At Aurora Expeditions we try to encourage our travellers to practise sustainable tourism whenever possible. Remember that in a lot of the places you visit, the infrastructure may not be the same as what you are used to in your home country. As tourism increases, it places a large strain on the local water and power supply and other resources. We encourage you to take short showers in your hotel, turn off the lights when you leave your hotel room, minimise waste, and if you plan to hike, make sure you bag your rubbish along the way.

Please also remember that many ecosystems in South America such as the Andes, the Amazon, Patagonia and the Pantanal are extremely delicate, so please stay on the trails and don't damage or take any plants, seed, cuttings or flowers. If you are snorkelling or diving, please do not touch or disturb the coral.

South American people are proud of their culture and ancestry. Although they are now accustomed to international tourists, each area continues to maintain their identity and culture. Generally, most South Americans dress conservatively, and we recommend wearing trousers, shorts and skirts that reach the knee, and long-sleeve shirts to minimise any potential offence, especially when entering religious or culturally sensitive sites.

Aurora Expeditions' ground operators employ local guides and use hotels that employ people from the local community. We also ensure that the majority of the food supplied on our tours is locally sourced. We do this to maximise economic benefit to the community and to ensure we minimise the carbon footprint of the places we visit (i.e. the food does not need to be transported long distances).

## Entrance Requirements & Visas

Visa requirements vary from country to country in Latin America, and they also vary for citizens of different countries. We therefore recommend you check with the Embassy or Consulate in your country of residence for the most up-to-date visa requirements of the countries you'll be visiting. If you need to transit en route to your final destination, please also check and ensure that a visa or some other form of visa waiver authorization (such as an electronic Travel Authorization or eTA) is not required for the country through which you will be transiting.

Countries such as Canada require an eTA from certain nationalities even if they are only transiting through Canada en route to another destination.

Clients are responsible for obtaining valid travel documents, complying with customs and other regulations of the country to which they are travelling. Aurora Expeditions does not accept responsibility for any problems related to/and or in obtaining these documents. We recommend carrying a photocopy of your passport at all time during your travels.



# South America Pre-Departure Guide

## Passport

Make sure your passport is valid for at least six months from the date you intend to return to your country of residence. The passport validity date varies from one country to the next, but generally a minimum of six months validity from your date of return is applicable.

Your passport is a valuable document and attractive to criminals who may try to use your identity to commit crimes. Always keep it in a safe place. Be aware of attempts to obtain access to your passport by deception. If you are forced to hand over your passport, contact the Embassy for advice.

Please note that in several Latin American countries a reciprocal entrance fee is charged for arriving passengers. This is subject to change at any time.

Please note that other countries may charge fees without warning, and these will be payable locally at the airport or land border crossing.

Some airports also charge an airport usage fee or embarkation fee that is not included in your ticket price.

All taxes and entrance fees are subject to change, and clients accept this as part of travel in Central America. Aurora Expeditions cannot be held responsible for these charges.

**Disclaimer:** While Aurora Expeditions will assist to obtain any necessary visas, we are not a consular service and it is the sole responsibility of the traveller to check and to obtain the necessary visas before departing your country of residence.

## Health Information

Aurora Expeditions recommend that you visit your family doctor or a travel medical centre for the latest information, but as a guide we recommend the following:

- Yellow fever – especially for jungle areas
- Hepatitis – both A and B (Twinrix)
- Typhoid
- Diphtheria
- Cholera
- Rabies
- Tetanus

Some of these you may already have from childhood immunisations – please check with your doctor. When travelling to jungle areas, please exercise caution and carry sufficient insect repellent and malaria protection, either medical or homeopathic remedies.

Altitude Sickness or Acute Mountain Sickness (AMS) – On reaching heights above 2,000m (6,562 ft), shortness of breath and heart pounding are a normal response to the lack of oxygen in the air.

These symptoms can sometimes deteriorate into a condition known as altitude sickness or AMS with resulting headaches, loss of appetite, extreme tiredness, insomnia, dizziness and sometimes nausea. Symptoms usually develop within the first day or two at altitude but generally disappear after 48–72 hours at altitude. We highly recommend acclimatising at altitude before taking strenuous treks or walks.

As a guide, Cusco is at 3,400m (11,200 ft), and the highest point of the Inca Trail is 4,200m (13,800 ft) above sea level.

Please remember that altitude sickness affects everyone differently and usually has nothing to do with your general fitness level. If your conditions persist while on tour, consult with the tour guide who will be happy to help you and be able to give you some options in regard to the rest of your trip. If you are really worried about AMS and/or have a history with it then talk to your consultant.

Yellow Fever – is a viral illness that is spread by the bite of a mosquito. It is endemic in tropical and subtropical regions of South America, although cases of tourists contracting the disease are rare.

All travellers to the jungle regions of Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, the Guianas, Paraguay, Peru, Panama and Venezuela should make sure that they have the relevant up-to-date vaccination.

**Note:** It is also important to carry your vaccination certificate with you on your travels in South American as you may be asked for evidence of vaccination upon arrival or departure at some airports.

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For some states of Brazil (generally in or around the Amazon rainforest), it is compulsory for all travellers to have a vaccination against yellow fever. It is also compulsory for all travellers to have a vaccination against yellow fever if entering Brazil through the following countries in South America:

- Bolivia
- Colombia
- Ecuador
- French Guiana
- Guyana
- Peru
- Suriname
- Venezuela

Similarly, travel to Central America from South America also requires all travellers to be vaccinated. If returning to your home country from South America, you may require to be vaccinated against yellow fever.

A single yellow fever vaccine is considered to cover lifetime immunity and countries cannot require revaccination at entry. However, revaccination may be indicated in specific cases. For example, travel to an area with ongoing outbreaks or travel for a prolonged period in an endemic area.

Please consult your GP or a travel doctor for more information on vaccinations.

It is every client's responsibility to have the necessary vaccinations for travel. Aurora Expeditions will not be held responsible for travel delays or refused entry into countries due to customers not having the necessary vaccinations.

## Flights and Additional Airport Taxes

We find that flights in South America don't always live up to passengers' expectations. Please keep in mind that you are likely to experience the following with your flights in South America:

- a) Long connection times:** Flights in South America often don't have the frequency that you may be accustomed to. Between some major cities (Lima to Rio for example) there are often only 1 or 2 flights per day and often if you have connecting flights there could be a long transit time in between (sometimes 4-5 hours or more). There's often not a lot that can be done about this unless you overnight in the transit location (often made harder if the airport is a long way from the city and there is no airport hotel).
- b) Flight departure times:** Key routes can often depart at inconvenient times (early morning or late evening).
- c) Seating arrangements:** Most South American airlines don't handle people who are ticketed separately particularly well. You and your travelling companions may be on different tickets for a number of reasons (often because of different starting or finishing locations). If this is the case, we can put a request into the airlines to ask for passengers to be sat together but this is more often than not ignored. Once tickets are ticketed separately they cannot be joined together.
- d) Schedule changes:** Flights departure times are change regularly in South America. Don't be surprised if a large number of your flight times are changed before departure. We recommend you check online just before departure to see what your latest flight times are. If you have not booked your flights through Aurora Expeditions' Travel Agency Services, it's important to advice Aurora Expeditions your flight record locator (normally a six-digit alphanumeric code) or flight details to allow our team to check your flight details and ensure that if there are any last-minute flight changes that your airport transfers are changed appropriately.

## Further information

The following websites give further health advice and information on travelling to South America:

<http://www.traveldoctor.com.au>

<http://travelvaccines.com.au/index.php/south-america>

<https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/list/>

## Packing Essentials

What you take will depend on when and where you are travelling and the types of activities included in your itinerary. The following should act as a useful checklist of essential items:

- Passport – ensure that it is valid, in good condition with empty pages available
- Photocopy of passport
- Travel Insurance – ensure that it will be valid for the entire journey
- Photograph the contents of your luggage, especially special/expensive items such as audio/visual equipment
- Passport photos – often needed for identification passes and certain overseas visas
- Air tickets and itinerary
- Foreign currency and/or debit/credit cards
- Debit/credit card cancellation phone numbers
- Emergency contact numbers
- Money belt – Ensure that it is discrete and comfortable to wear
- Basic first aid kit – band aids/bandages, anti-diarrhoea remedy, paracetamol/aspirin, rehydration remedy, antiseptic cream/powder, sterile dressing, personal medication
- Sea sickness medication
- Personal medication – we recommend carrying this in your hand luggage at all times
- Moisturiser for wind and/or sunburn
- Sunscreen and chap stick
- Sunglasses & sunhat
- Mosquito spray & insect repellent
- Comfortable walking shoes and sandals
- Long-sleeve top and trousers – useful to protect against mosquitoes at dawn and dusk and the sun through the day
- Lightweight & light-coloured clothing
- Warm clothing (depending on itinerary and time of year)
- Camera with spare battery and memory cards
- Laptop, for image processing and other data
- USB stick to share photos with fellow passengers

- Security code padlock
- Adaptor
- Power board for charging multiple devices
- Small torch
- Dry bag or plastic bag for camera
- Refillable water bottle to take on shore excursions
- External hard drive for storing downloaded images
- Extra prescription glasses or contact lenses
- Ear plugs (especially if you are sharing a cabin)
- Swimwear (for sauna and plunge pools)
- Binoculars for wildlife viewing from ship
- Combination voltage converter and plug adapter

## Additional Spending Money

South America can vary greatly in terms of prices in each country. The following should be used as a rough guide for additional spending money.

Chile: Approximately 60–70 USD per day

Peru: Approximately 20–30 USD per day

Ecuador: Approximately 40–50 USD per day

Colombia: Approximately 20–30 USD per day

Argentina: Approximately 35–45 USD per day

Bolivia: Approximately 25–30 USD per day

Brazil: Approximately 40–50 USD per day

**Note:** These should only be used as a guide and your actual travel costs will depend on your travel style, tastes and personal budget.



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### Shopping and Bargaining Tips

Bargaining is common in South America and is expected in markets and small shops. Please ask your local guide for a few tips! Anything from local handicrafts to designer clothing can be bought in South America and is generally at a lower cost than your home country (especially in Peru, Bolivia, and Ecuador).

Gold and silver are also very affordable, particularly in Peru. Please beware of taking home items made of wood as quarantine can be strict with timber items that may contain insects and seeds.

As a rule, when bargaining, start off asking for half of what the original price is and work your way up! Have a price in mind that you're happy to pay and aim for that. Hagglng should be always be conducted in a fun and light-hearted way, never aggressively. Both parties should be happy at the end of the process. Don't start negotiating unless you are serious about buying an item. You may need to haggle for anything ... from a souvenir to a taxi fare, but never for food.

On many of shore excursions, we try to take customers to local markets rather than the expensive tourist orientated bazaars. These markets have a higher level of locally-made products and allow you to give something back to the local community, rather than to a middle man.

### Tipping Guidelines

Called a 'propina' in Spanish, a tip in Latin America is generally given to reward good service but it is not mandatory. If you feel a particular local guide, driver, waiter or host has provided excellent service, offering a tip will be greatly appreciated. As a guide we recommend 10 per cent of the bill for restaurants and US\$5-15 per day for a local tour guide and US\$2-5 per day for drivers. Generally, tipping is not required for airport transfer services.

### Electrical Outlets in South America

Most countries in South America use the European style outlet which contains 110 volts. Visit the below website for more information on each country:  
<http://electricaloutlet.org>



# South America Pre-Departure Guide

## Safety in South America

Most South American countries have now recognised that tourism plays an important part in their economies and governments have taken great steps in the last few years to change Latin America's poor security image. You'll find a lot more police, especially plain-clothed officers, in the towns and cities most frequented by tourists.

Here are some tips to minimise any security risks:

- When taking taxis from an airport to your hotel, travel in the more expensive airport taxis and ensure that the drivers have official identification. Never take a taxi waiting outside the airport grounds. Better still, book an arrival airport transfer prior to departure so that you have peace of mind knowing you will be met on arrival.
- Travel in a group if possible.
- Learn the basics in Spanish before you arrive in South America. Don't expect that everyone will speak English.
- Keep your valuables hidden and watch your pockets especially around busy tourist areas such as Florida St in Buenos Aires and La Mariscal in Quito.
- Avoid going on your own to remote areas where tourists would not be expected to go.
- Seek local advice or take a guide.
- Read the guide books and talk with other travellers to find out which areas are best avoided.
- If travelling solo, avoid becoming intoxicated. When leaving nightclubs/bars/discos late at night take a taxi home no matter how close your hostel or hotel is.
- Although assaults are rare, theft can be prevalent. Thieves are experts at making the most of a good opportunity – a moment's lapse in a tourist's concentration is their business. Long bus trips, crowded streets and packed trains are all their territory. We don't recommend that you avoid these places because you can't, but again common sense should always prevail.
- On long bus journeys, your luggage will normally be stowed in the external luggage compartments. Ask for a receipt for your bags and keep an eye out each time the bus stops to ensure your bags are not offloaded accidentally.

- If the pavements are really crowded, especially in market areas, walk on the road. Bag slashing is rare these days, but for added safety you can wear your day pack on your chest. If it's on your back, try to walk without stopping.

- Avoid putting your bag down on the floor to take a photo. At cafés, keep your bag on your lap.

If you are unfortunate enough to be robbed during your travels, try not to let it ruin your holiday – most things can be replaced in Latin America. Make sure that you have travel insurance and that you've read the small print before arriving in Latin America, so you know what is required to make a successful claim.

## Insurance

Please note travel insurance is mandatory on all Aurora Expeditions trips. Please speak with your travel consultant for recommendations on travel insurance providers pertaining to your country of residence.



# South America Pre-Departure Guide



## Argentina - General Information

**Population:** approximately 44.2 million

**Capital:** Buenos Aires

Argentina is one of the most popular destinations in South America. Situated between the Andes to the west and the Atlantic Ocean to the east, it is a land dramatic of mountains, the cascading waterfalls of Iguazú, the vast grassy plains of the Pampas, wonderful estancias (ranches) where you can horse ride all day and not see another soul, and the cosmopolitan city of Buenos Aires, with a population of approximately 13 million inhabitants.

Argentina conjures up images of tango dancers, elegant architecture, Gauchos on horseback, polo and mouth-watering steaks. Throw in the fascinating culture and lunar landscapes of the northwest, the gorgeous vineyards around Mendoza, and the incredible marine wildlife of the Valdés Peninsula, and you have a dynamic and endlessly varied combination of experiences to enjoy.

### Interesting Facts

- The national dance of Argentina is the tango.
- The Perito Moreno Glacier in El Calafate holds the world's third largest reserve of fresh water in the world.
- The Tierra del Fuego National Park stretches across both Argentina and Chile.

### Money

The unit of currency in Argentina is the Argentinian peso (ARS).

It is easy to change foreign currency in Argentina and there are many currency exchange services (casas de cambio) throughout the country. You are advised not to change money at the money changers located just after Immigration at Ezeiza Airport in Buenos Aires, as the exchange rates are very low.

If you have to change foreign cash at the airport, you should go to the Banco de la Nación where better rates are available for larger banknotes (e.g. US\$50 or US\$100). US dollars are widely accepted in large hotels, top-end restaurants, supermarkets and major stores but please note that you will always receive change in pesos, even when you pay with US dollars.

ATMs (cajeros automaticos) are widespread in Buenos Aires and other large cities and are located in banks, shopping centres and some supermarkets. Smaller towns generally have at least one ATM. Many banks have daily withdrawal limits of 2,000 pesos or less, but sometimes there are lower limits on international debit cards. Visitors are advised to always carry some cash while in Argentina as ATMs do not always accept foreign cards.

Banks are generally open from 10.00 am to 3.00 pm Monday to Friday and closed on weekends.

Visa card is the most widely accepted credit card, followed closely by Mastercard. Most large hotels and restaurants accept credit cards.

Please check websites such as [www.oanda.com](http://www.oanda.com) or [www.xe.com](http://www.xe.com) for up-to-date exchange rates prior to your departure.

Shops are open Monday to Friday 9.00 am to 7.30 pm and on Saturdays from 9.00 am to 2.00 pm. During the siesta, around 1.00–5.00 pm, many shops are closed. Larger supermarkets and shopping malls are often open all day on weekends.

### Reciprocity Fee

Please note that Australian, US and Canadian citizens are no longer required to pay a 'reciprocity fee' when entering Argentina.



## Additional Tax

The Iguazú Tourist Tax has been introduced and is charged on check-out at all hotels in Iguazú (both the Argentine and Brazil sides). The tax is currently ARS50 (US\$1.40) per person per stay. Please note that this tax is subject to change without notice.

An ecotourism tax is now charged to visitors staying at the hotel in Bariloche. The tax is charged per person per night for a maximum of three nights and is payable on check-out.

- 5-star accommodation: ARS \$60 per person per night
- 4-star accommodation: ARS \$45 per person per night
- 3-star accommodation: ARS \$30 per person per night

## Airport Information

(for clients joining our voyages to Antarctica)

### Buenos Aires

International Airport - Ministro Pistarini International Airport (EZE) is located 22 kilometres / 13.5 miles from downtown Buenos Aires. It will take approximately 45-90 minutes to reach your hotel, subject to traffic conditions. Pre-book your arrival or departure airport shuttle with Aurora Expeditions to have our local representative personally meet and transfer you to your destination, or make your own arrangements by taxi for approximately USD \$30-40 (Taxis are not always readily available).

Domestic Airport - Jorge Newbery Airfield (AEP) is located just 2 kilometres / 1.2 miles from downtown Buenos Aires. It will take approximately 15-30 minutes to reach your hotel, subject to traffic conditions. Pre-book your arrival or departure airport shuttle with Aurora Expeditions to have our local representative personally meet and transfer you to your destination, or make your own arrangements by taxi for approximately USD \$10-15 (Taxis are not always readily available).

### Ushuaia

International Airport - Malvinas Argentinas Ushuaia International Airport (USH) is located just 4 kilometres / 2.5 miles from downtown Ushuaia. It will take approximately 15-30 minutes to reach your hotel, subject to traffic conditions. Pre-book your arrival or departure airport shuttle with Aurora Expeditions to have our local representative personally meet and transfer you to your destination, or make your own arrangements by taxi for approximately USD \$15-30 (Taxis are not always readily available).

### El Calafate

International Airport - Comandante Armando Tola International Airport (FTE) is located 22 kilometres / 13.5 miles from downtown El Calafate. It will take approximately 15-30 minutes to reach your hotel, subject to traffic conditions. Pre-book your arrival or departure airport shuttle with Aurora Expeditions to have our local representative personally meet and transfer you to your destination, or make your own arrangements by taxi for approximately USD \$20-30 (Taxis are not always readily available).

## Voyage Embarkation & Disembarkation Information - Ushuaia

**Embarkation:** The Greg Mortimer departs from the main Ushuaia Commercial Port, located a short walk from the city centre. Ensure you have your passports and ship tickets ready for inspection at the port entrance. Luggage will be collected from your Ushuaia hotel and transferred to the ship on the morning of your departure.

Please ensure all valuables, including passports, money and electronic items, are kept with you in your hand luggage. Embarkation is usually at 4.00pm. However, exact embarkation and luggage collection times will be provided by Aurora Expeditions in your final documentation (information printed on your ship ticket).

**Disembarkation:** starts commences at 8.00am. A shared transfer to the airport or to downtown Ushuaia is included in the cost of your voyage. If you are flying out of Ushuaia on the day of disembarkation, please ensure that your flight is after 12.00pm (NOON).

**The Tango:** The tango tradition started at the end of the last century, developing from a mix of various rhythms, which were originally danced in the poorer quarters of the city. In the beginning, the tango was only danced by men to the accompaniment of flutes, violins and guitars. The flutes were later replaced by the 'bandoneón' (a type of accordion), which gave the tango its distinctive sound. Reflecting the nostalgia and melancholy of mostly European immigrants, the tango produced some great musicians, such as Astor Piazzolla and Anibal Troilo.

# South America Pre-Departure Guide

## Flora & Fauna

The wildlife in Argentina is as varied as its climatic regions. In the Iguazú National Park you will see parrots, toucan, jaguar, caiman and monkeys, whereas on the Peninsula Valdés in Patagonia, you will observe sea lions, elephant seals and whales, guanacos, and the largest colony of Magellanic penguins in the world in Punta Tombo. Argentina has a diverse range of ecosystems from subtropical, evergreen rainforest in the northeast, desert in the north, and forests, steppe and marshland in Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego.

## Time Zone

Argentina is in Greenwich Meantime GMT-3

## Taxis – Warning

Do not pay for a taxi with high denomination banknotes such as 50 or 100 pesos. Taxi drivers, especially in Buenos Aires, are known for their 'fake note' scams. If a tourist pays for a taxi with a high denomination note, the taxi driver switches it with a fake note and then tells the passenger it is fake and refuses to accept it. The driver has therefore managed to off-load a fake banknote on to the unsuspecting tourist. Only pay with coins or low denomination notes or when taking taxis.

## Electricity

Electricity in Argentina is 220 volts.

## Long-Distance Dialling, Emergency Numbers, Internet

Country code: + 54 Ambulance: 107

Police: 101

Internet cafés with reasonably priced internet access are widespread throughout Argentina although upload/download speeds may vary. Wi-fi is becoming increasingly common in many hotels as well as in cafés and restaurants and is generally free.

## Climate

Argentina stretches across several latitudes, which means its climate ranges from subtropical along the north-eastern border with Brazil, to subpolar in the Tierra del Fuego region in the far south. Patagonia has dry, almost desert-like conditions because it is sheltered from prevailing westerly winds by the southern Andes.

In the north of Argentina, the weather is sunny and dry for most of the year and temperatures can reach 35°C (95°F) and above. There is also a wet season here from December to March when it can be uncomfortably humid.

Buenos Aires has a temperate climate year-round – although it can get quite hot and humid in the main summer months of January and February and be quite cool and wet during the winter. Average temperatures range from 24°C (75°F) to 11°C (51°F).

Further south, in Patagonia, the weather is extremely cold for most of the year, except for the summer months (November to March) when it can be surprisingly warm and pleasant. The average winter temperature in Patagonia's main resort town, Ushuaia, is zero.

## Best Travel Time

Travelling is good year-round; however, Patagonia is best from October to April and the north is best visited between May and September.

## Clothing

The perfect outfit depends on the destination. Visitors to Patagonia or Tierra del Fuego should use regular outdoor wear to protect against wind and rain. Visitors to the coast and the tropical regions should pack summer clothes, and in the north-west, visitors should include clothing appropriate for the changes in temperature from day to night.



## South America Pre-Departure Guide

### Cuisine

The cuisine of Argentina is distinctive in South America because of its strong resemblance to Italian, Spanish, French and other European cuisines. Indigenous gastronomies derived from groups such as the Quechua, Mapuche and Guaraní, have also played a role.

Grilled meats and pasta are common with extensive use of local ingredients. Lamb is one of the traditional meats of Argentina. It is lean and grass-fed on the Patagonian Steppe. It is typically cooked by stretching it across a metal frame and slowly grilling it for several hours over an open fire. Certain foods can be found in all corners of the country. These include asado (barbecued meat), dulce de leche (similar to caramel made from sugar and milk) and empanadas

Another factor influencing Argentine cuisine is that Argentina is one of the world's major food producers. Argentina is a major producer of meat (especially beef), and so red meat is an extremely common part of the Argentine diet. The specialty as such is Argentinean beef, which is prepared on an open fire, the "asado", usually accompanied with sausages and other types of meat.

Recommended Argentinian dishes include: empanadas, asado, pastel de choclo (corn casserole with meat stuffing), and cazuela (homemade stew with beef, chicken, corn, rice and potatoes).

'Mate' (pronounced 'ma tay') is a bitter tea that is drunk frequently in Argentina. It is a bitter infusion of the leaves of a South American shrub and prepared by steeping dried yerba leaves in hot water. It is drunk through a metal straw from a shared hollow calabash gourd.

Argentina is also well known for its wines. The most important wine regions of the country are located in the provinces of Mendoza, San Juan and La Rioja. Malbec is one of the country's best-known varieties and Argentina's signature red grape variety. Pinot noir is Patagonia's iconic grape variety.

### Language

Argentina's official language is Spanish, but Argentinian Spanish differs from Spanish spoken in other countries, mainly due to the Italian-sounding pronunciation. Indigenous languages spoken today include Tehuelche, Guaraní and Quechua. Many immigrant groups have continued to speak their own language and so you will also find many other languages in Argentina including Italian, German, English, French and even Welsh.

### National Holidays

New Year, Carnival, Memorial Day, Holy Week, Day of the Veterans, Labour Day, National Day/May 1810 Revolution, Commemoration of General Don Martin Miguel de Guemes, Flag Day, Independence Day, Independence of Guayaquil, All Soul's Day, Independence of Cuenca, Christmas Day.



# South America Pre-Departure Guide



## Bolivia - General Information

**Population:** approximately 11 million

**Capital:** Sucre

Bolivia is the highest, most rugged and most isolated country in the Southern Hemisphere and a destination well worth exploring. This landlocked country bordering Lake Titicaca, has unparalleled landscapes ranging from rainforests to mountains; deserts to lagoons, and volcanoes. It boasts amazing geological phenomena such as the Salar de Uyuni, the world's largest salt lake, the Valley of the Moon, as well as towering Andean peaks and thousands of square kilometres of virgin Amazon rainforest.

Bolivia has a long, eventful history from Inca conquest to Spanish conquest, to troubled independence. This has inevitably left its cultural mark and can be seen in pre-Inca ruins such as Tiwanaku, remnants of the Inca Empire such as the Temple of the Moon on Lake Titicaca, colonial architecture in Sucre and La Paz, and bustling modern cities such as Santa Cruz.

## Interesting Facts

- Bolivia has the highest percentage of indigenous people in South America.
- Bolivia and Peru border and share control of Lake Titicaca, the highest navigable lake in the world.
- Bolivia produces around 70 per cent of the world's Brazil nuts.

## Time Zone

Bolivia is in Greenwich Meantime GMT-4

## Money

Bolivia's unit of currency is the boliviano (BOB).

We recommend that you travel with a supply of US dollars, as well as small amounts of local currency, as the US dollar is readily accepted in major department stores, hotels and tourist areas. Use local currency for small purchases. Dollars can be changed in currency exchange services (casas de cambio), hotels and tourist offices or on the street. Street vendors usually give a better rate; however, proceed with caution! Banks are closed on Saturdays and Sundays.

Please ensure that the US dollar bills you take with you to Bolivia are crisp, new bills. It is almost impossible to change US dollar bills that have even the slightest tear or marking on them – even at the airport.

Although banks supposedly have to accept them, there are reports that some banks discount the exchange rate by 20 per cent for dollar bills that are not in pristine condition.

Please check websites such as [www.oanda.com](http://www.oanda.com) or [www.xe.com](http://www.xe.com) for up-to-date exchange rates prior to your departure.

## Business Hours

Normal business hours are Monday to Friday from 8.00 am to 12.30 pm, and from about 2:30 pm until 6:30 or 7.00 pm. Many businesses now open continuously from 8.00 am to 6.00 pm. Shopping hours are generally Monday to Saturday from 9.30 am to 7.00 pm. Stores usually open on Saturdays from 8.00 am to 1.00 pm. Most stores are closed on Sundays with the exception of grocery stores, restaurants and some markets.

## Electricity Voltage

In Bolivia more than one voltage is used (115 or 230). It can depend on the region, the city or even the hotel in which you are staying as to what voltage will be available.

## Long-Distance Dialling, Emergency Numbers, Internet

Country code: + 591

Ambulance: 118

Police: 110

Internet cafés are widespread throughout Bolivia and Wi-Fi is becoming increasingly common in many hotels – certainly in the mid- to high-range hotels.

# South America Pre-Departure Guide

## Climate

The climate also varies significantly across Bolivia depending on altitude and from one climatic zone to another. It ranges from tropical, humid to cold, semi-arid.

The wettest period is during the summer months November to March. Winter (May to October) is perhaps the best time to visit, especially in the hot and humid lowlands, as it will be cooler and drier. In the highlands, it rains much less and remains sunny throughout the day, but becomes noticeably colder at night. Mountain areas can become very cold at night.

The Altiplano experiences dry and polar-like climates, with strong and cold winds. The average temperature range is 15–20°C / 59–68°F, but at night temperatures fall significantly to nearly zero. Frosts and snow are frequent.

In the Salar de Uyuni (salt flats), the weather conditions can be extreme – from hot fierce sun during the day, to freezing temperatures at night. The temperatures typically average 20°C / 68°F during the day but during the night, can dip well below freezing with the wind chill adding to the cold. It is not uncommon for temperatures in the Salar de Uyuni to reach 30°C / 86°F during the day and fall to –25°C / –13°F at night.

## Cuisine

Corn, potatoes and beans are the three traditional staples of Bolivia and these have been combined with a number of other staple ingredients brought by the Spanish, such as rice and wheat, and meat including beef, pork and chicken. In rural areas guinea pig (cuy) and rabbits are also eaten.

Almuerzo (lunch) is the most important meal of the Bolivian day and daily life revolves around it. Deep frying is a common cooking method for most meats, fried chicken being a very popular dish. A common accompaniment to Bolivian meals is llajhua, a spicy sauce similar to Mexican salsa.

Some notable Bolivian dishes include:

**Pique a lo macho** – grilled chunks of meat in a slightly spicy sauce with tomatoes and onion, served with potatoes

**Silpancho or milanesa** – beef pounded to a thin, plate-sized patty, served on a bed of rice and potatoes with a fried egg on top

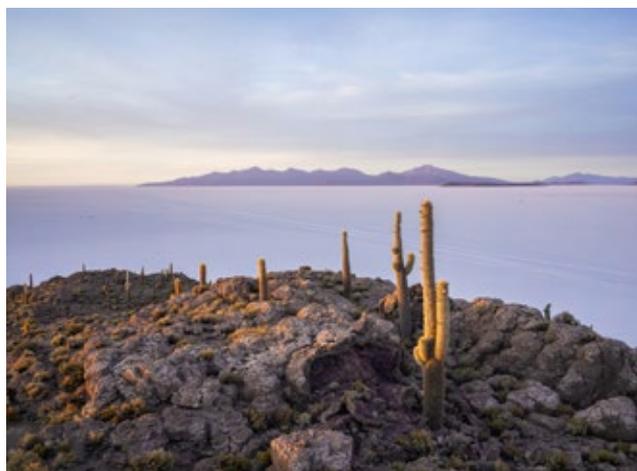
We recommend that you drink bottled water and avoid tap water at all times even when brushing your teeth.

## Language

The languages of Bolivia include Spanish and a range of indigenous languages. Spanish and Quechua are spoken primarily in the Andes region, Aymara is mainly spoken in the Altiplano region around Lake Titicaca, with Guaraní being spoken in the south-east on the border with Paraguay.

## National Holidays

New Year's Day, Carnival, Holy Week, Labour Day, Corpus Christi, Independence Day, All Soul's Day, Christmas Day



# South America Pre-Departure Guide



## Brazil - General Information

**Population:** approximately 210 million

**Capital:** Brasília

Brazil is famous as a destination for those wanting to indulge in rainforests, sun, sea, samba and carnivals. Rio de Janeiro is a vibrant, pulsating and inspiringly beautiful city famed for its breathtaking setting, and home to the world-famous Carnival! The views from Sugarloaf Mountain and Corcovado Mountain, where the statue of Christ the Redeemer stands with arms outstretched and watching over the city, are spectacular. Then of course there are the famous beaches of Copacabana and Ipanema, where you can observe the fascinating beach culture and sip on a caipirinha, the national cocktail, at one of the many beach-side bars.

Brazil has boundless attractions and experiences to enjoy. From the 8,000 kilometres / 4,970 miles of coastline, the Amazon region – containing one fifth of the planet's freshwater – the Pantanal Marshlands, a 130,000-square kilometre / 80,778 square feet ecological reserve showcasing a plethora of wildlife and Iguassu Falls, the widest and most magnificent waterfalls in the world, Brazil is home to the most stunning of landscapes.

The preserved colonial towns of Ouro Preto and Olinda – declared Cultural Heritage of Mankind by UNESCO – Brasília, the country's capital and world famous for its most contemporary style and design, São Paulo, the second biggest metropolis in the world, and Rio de Janeiro, a beautiful jewel nestled among mountains, forest and ocean, showcase the diverse architecture and history of its people accompanied by the exotic African rhythm that lies in El Salvador de Bahia.

Brazil is the fourth largest country in the world, occupying half of the total area of South America. Its 8.5 million square kilometre / 3.3 million square mile territory is equivalent to all the European countries, except Russia, combined. The population is just under 200 million made up of descendants of Portuguese colonists, Africans brought as slaves from mid-16th to mid-19th century, plus European and Asian immigrants who started bringing their skills and culture to the country during the mid-19th century. Brazil has a predominantly young population, with more than 60 per cent of people under 30 years of age.

## Interesting Facts

- The famous Brazilian Carnival is celebrated in February or March across the country.
- Brazil is the fifth largest country in the world.
- The national cocktail is the caipirinha made from Cachaça, a sugar cane spirit.

## Additional Tax

Please note the Iguazú Tourist Tax is now being implemented and charged on check-out at all hotels in Iguazú (in both Argentina and Brazil).

## English-Speaking Staff

There is a general lack of English-speaking staff in service industries throughout Brazil.

## Arrival Transfers

Please do not be alarmed if public and private vehicles (transfers, taxis, buses) do not stop at red lights between the hours of 10.00 pm and 6.00 am. It is not a legal requirement for vehicles to stop at red lights in Brazil during these hours and is in the interest of passenger safety.



## South America Pre-Departure Guide

### Wi-fi and Safety Deposit Box Charges

Please note that some hotels in Brazil, particularly in Rio de Janeiro, charge a small fee for the use of guest room safety deposit boxes and Wi-Fi. Please enquire upon check-in to avoid unexpected charges upon check-out.

### Carnivale

The main event, for which Brazil is world-renowned, is Carnivale. Carnivale takes place over four days prior to Ash-Wednesday. It is commemorated in Rio, Salvador and Recife and Olinda.

Carnivale in Rio is the world's largest and most spectacular show and its most famous feature is the Samba Schools Parade, a colourful and bright four-day show displaying magnificent floats and thousands of people dressed in dazzling costumes dancing and singing, along the Parade Avenue. Besides this, countless number of independent groups of revellers scattered all over the city enjoy their Carnival in a more informal way. Local neighbourhood bands, club balls and minor parades also contribute to make Rio's Carnival the biggest party in the world.

In Salvador, people take to the streets in organised in blocos (groups of people wearing the same costumes). Some of the blocos are related to African culture and religion, known as the 'afoxes'. Another unique characteristic of Carnival in Salvador is the trio's eletricos, huge sound trucks followed along the streets by dancing and singing crowds.

The rhythm of Carnival in Salvador is a mixture of various Brazilian rhythms, including samba, frevo and lambada, plus Caribbean rhythms and other African rhythms from Bahia.

In the two neighbouring cities of Recife and Olinda, the local beats of frevo and maracatu rhythms dominate, with frevo groups on the streets swaying to the music with ardent passion and huge papier-mâché figures featuring caricatures of folk heroes and politicians following behind and richly decorated handcrafted banners fluttering in the air.

### Time Zone

Brazil is in Greenwich Meantime GMT -2 /-5

### Electricity

Power outlets vary. In some parts of the country 110 volts is available, and in others, 220 volts. Major hotels have both voltages. Please pack a converter and an adaptor.

### Money

The unit of currency in Brazil is the Brazilian real (BRL).

Brazil has a very extensive banking network and ATMs are widely available. Most banks have ATM facilities, some of which accept foreign credit and debit cards. The permitted withdrawal amount per card per day is generally R\$1,000 but this is reduced to R\$500 after 10.00 pm.

The most popular international credit and debit cards include Visa, Mastercard, Cirrus and Maestro.

Foreign currency and US dollar traveller's cheques can be exchanged in foreign exchange offices, banks and also in some travel agencies and hotels. The exchange rate for cash is usually slightly better but exchange fees in general are quite high. To change your money, you will need your passport. Please note that it can be very difficult to change money at weekends.

Please check websites such as [www.oanda.com](http://www.oanda.com) or [www.xe.com](http://www.xe.com) for up-to-date exchange rates prior to your departure.

### Business Hours

Shops are usually open weekdays from 9.00 am to 6.30 pm and Saturdays from 9.00 am to 1.00 pm. Most are closed on Sundays. Mall hours are generally weekdays and Saturdays from 10.00 am to 10.00 pm. Some malls only open on Sundays around 2.00 pm.

### Long-Distance Dialling, Emergency Numbers, Internet

Country code: + 55

Ambulance: 192

Police: 190

Internet is readily available in Brazil and many hotels offer high-speed connections. Wi-fi is also becoming increasingly common in hostels and hotels as well as in some cafés and restaurants, but please note that some hotels will charge for Wi-Fi access. Most of the larger Brazilian cities now have internet cafés that offer inexpensive, high-speed internet.

## South America Pre-Departure Guide

### Climate

Brazil's climate varies considerably from tropical in the north, to the temperate regions south of the Tropic of Capricorn. Summer in Brazil runs from December to March and winter from June to September. The wet season occurs at the end of the summer months, with the Pantanal and the Amazon having the most pronounced wet seasons between November and May.

Even during the winter months, the climate across most of Brazil is moderate with temperatures in major cities such as Rio de Janeiro, Curitiba and São Paulo, averaging 13–18°C (55–65°F). In the summer, the weather is hot and extremely humid everywhere south of Rio and along the coastline north of Rio. Temperatures higher than 38°C (100°F) are frequently recorded.

In the Amazon, temperatures in the high 30s (°C) are common year-round. Further south, around São Paulo and parts of Minas Gerais, winter temperatures can be as low as 5–8°C. In the southern states of Santa Catarina and Rio Grande do Sul, snow can fall in winter, although it is usually every light.

### Cuisine

Brazilian cuisine varies greatly from region to region, but fresh meat and fish play an important role in the Brazilian diet.

In Rio de Janeiro and the south-east, feijoada is a typical dish. The dish is a stew that consists mainly of beans and meat simmered with herbs and spices. Originally prepared by slaves, it has now been turned into a delicacy. The most important food in Brazil is manioc (or cassava), which is used in the preparation of many dishes.

The cuisine and the cooking methods used in the north and the Amazon are notably different, reflecting the Amerindian heritage of that area. Fish is very important and is the base for many stews and soups. One extremely popular dish is pato no tucupi – duck marinated in lemon juice, oil and garlic, roasted and topped with a sauce made from manioc juice extracts and jambu leaves.

Other typical dishes include:

- **Coxinha** – a thigh-shaped chicken croquette
- **Brazilian empanadas** – pastry pies, usually with prawns or chicken
- **Churrasco** – Brazilian barbecue, with grilled chicken, beef and lamb
- **Moqueca Capixaba** – tomato and fish stew prepared in a clay pot
- **Guava ice cream**
- **Cuscuz Branco** – similar to couscous but prepared with coconut milk and sugar and served as a dessert

The national alcoholic beverage of Brazil is cachaça, which is distilled from sugar cane. The national cocktail is caipirinha, made from cachaça, lime juice, sugar and ice.

### Language

The official language of Brazil is Portuguese but it is slightly different to the Portuguese spoken in Portugal, mainly due to differences in pronunciation. The number of English-speaking Brazilians is very low, even in major towns and cities.



# South America Pre-Departure Guide



## Chile - General Information

**Population:** approximately 18.2 million

**Capital:** Santiago

Chile is one of the longest north-south countries in the world, occupying a narrow strip of land between the Pacific Ocean and the Andes mountain range. Like Argentina, Chile's landscapes are diverse and its scenery spectacular – ranging from the arid Atacama Desert in the north with its geysers and fascinating rock formations, to rugged and breathtakingly beautiful Patagonia in the south with its volcanoes, lakes, glaciers and fjords. Easter Island is also part of Chile and famous for its giant statues carved from volcanic rock.

Then of course there is the capital Santiago, surrounded by snow-capped peaks and testament to the emergence of Chile as the modern economy in the region.

## Interesting Facts

- Chile's boundary length (including coastline) is 12,606 kilometres (7,833 miles).
- Easter Island is the world's most isolated island. It is 3,600 kilometres (2,237 miles) west of the mainland, and home to 887 Moai – giant figures carved out of volcanic rock.
- The Atacama Desert in the north of Chile is the driest place on earth, with an average rainfall of less than 0.05 millimetres (imperial measurement to be inserted here) per year.

## Reciprocity Fee

Reciprocity Fee: Between 17 Dec 2019 and 8 May 2020, the 'reciprocity fee' to enter Chile has been waived for Australian passport holders. After this, the Chilean government intends to introduce eVisas which will be compulsory for Australian passport holders. Details of the eVisa are not yet known and will be updated as soon as the advice is received from the Chilean Government.

There is an entrance fee of US\$63 for ALL tourists travelling to Easter Island. Aurora Expeditions is no longer permitted to collect this on behalf of the indigenous people of Easter Island and all visitors to the island must pay this fee on arrival at Easter Island. Please note that this fee is subject to change.

## Airport Information

(for clients joining our voyages to Antarctica)

### Santiago

International Airport - Santiago 'Comodoro Arturo Merino Benítez International Airport (SCL) is located 20 kilometres from downtown Santiago. It will take approximately 45-90 minutes to reach your hotel, subject to traffic conditions.

Pre-book your arrival or departure airport shuttle with Aurora Expeditions to have our local representative personally meet and transfer you to your destination, or make your own arrangements by taxi for approximately USD \$30-50 (Taxis are not always readily available).

### Punta Arenas

International Airport - Presidente Carlos Ibáñez International Airport (PUQ) is located 20 kilometres from downtown Punta Arenas. It will take approximately 15-30 minutes to reach your hotel, subject to traffic conditions.

Pre-book your arrival or departure airport shuttle with Aurora Expeditions to have our local representative personally meet and transfer you to your destination, or make your own arrangements by taxi for approximately USD \$15-30 (Taxis are not always readily available).

## Time Zone

Mainland Chile is in Greenwich Meantime GMT-3

Easter Island is in GMT-5



## South America Pre-Departure Guide

### Money

The unit of currency in Chile is the Chilean peso (CLP).

ATMs (cajeros automaticos) are widespread across the country and each bank charges its own fee for cash withdrawals. The fee is generally CLP2,500 and the maximum withdrawal allowed is CLP200,000.

Banks are open Monday to Friday from 9.00 am to 2.00 pm and closed on weekends.

Money exchanges are open Monday to Friday from 9.00 am to 2.00 pm and 3.00 pm to 6.00 pm.

Currencies other than the Chilean peso are not widely accepted in Chile, but most cities have foreign exchange services (Casa de Cambio) with reasonable rates for the exchange of euros and US dollars. Hotel and airport exchange rates tend to be much lower than those in foreign exchange bureaus.

Please check websites such as [www.oanda.com](http://www.oanda.com) or [www.xe.com](http://www.xe.com) for up-to-date exchange rates prior to your departure.

Shops in Santiago are open from 10.00 am to 8.00 pm. Malls and supermarkets are open until 9.00 pm.

### Long-Distance Dialling, Emergency Numbers

Country code: + 56

Ambulance: 131

Police: 133

### Climate

Geographical diversity throughout Chile gives rise to several distinct climatic regions with extremes of temperature, sunlight and rainfall. This may restrict travel in some cases.

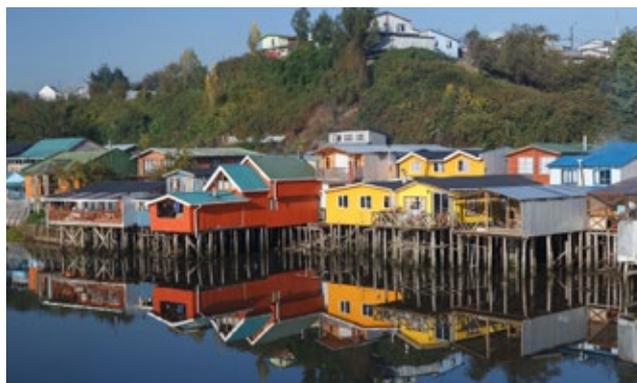
The weather is extremely erratic in Patagonia. It varies from warm sunshine to drizzle, rain and/or sleet in a matter of minutes and returning to sunshine just as quickly. Wind is a constant factor and can range from strong breezes of 24–32 kph (14.9–19.8 mph) to gale force at 96 kph/ (59.6 mph).

Clothing and outdoor gear should be adaptable to cope with unpredictable weather. The prime season for adventure travel in Patagonia is October to March when average daytime high temperatures range from 18°C (64.5°F) to low 4°C (39°F). Night-time temperatures are can range from -1°C (30.2°F) to -7°C (19.4°F).

Spring and summer in the Southern Hemisphere (October to March) are characterised by long days and warmer drier weather. During summer you can expect some warm sunny weather as well as cold, rainy and windy days.

Although the season for adventure travel in Patagonia is limited, you can travel in many areas of northern Chile throughout the year. The climate in Santiago is temperate and moderated by maritime air. Expect warm sunny days during summer (December to March) with temperatures around 21–27°C (69.8–80.6°F), and cool cloudy weather in winter (June to August), around 10°C (50°F).

The Andes region including the Lakes District from Puerto Montt to Bariloche (Argentina), has a cool mountain climate from October to April and is usually 10–13°C (50–55.4°F). The high Andes region of northern Chile is typically dry and clear especially in May to September. The Atacama Desert of northern Chile is always dry and suitable year-round travel.



### Cuisine

Chile is not known for its gastronomy and Chilean food is fairly simple featuring seafood, beef, fruit and vegetables – especially avocado and potatoes. The cuisine stems from a combination of traditional Spanish cuisine, Chilean indigenous culture and local ingredients and is influenced by German, Italian and French cuisines.

The country is probably best known for its seafood with an immense array of fish and shellfish being caught along its long coastline including abalone, razor clams, mussels, spider crabs, oysters, conger eels, salmon and sole.

Beef now tends to be more common than llama meat, having been introduced by Europeans. Traditional dishes include:

**Pastel de choclo** – A layered pie of minced beef stew, chicken, olives and hard-boiled egg topped with corn and basil and then baked

**Empanadas fritas de queso** – empanadas filled with cheese, then deep-fried

**Empanada de Pino** – empanada filled with diced meat, onions, olives, raisins and a piece of hard-boiled egg, then baked

**Cazuela marina/pollo** – seafood/chicken stew

**Asado de cordero** – barbecued lamb barbecue

**Tomaticán** – thick vegetable stew

**Bistec a la pobre** – beef steak topped with a fried egg, served with French fries and onions

**Porotos granados** – bean stew.

**Sopaipilla** – flat circular deep-fried ‘bread’ made of pumpkin and flour

In Santiago, a popular snack is completo, a hotdog filled with sausage, avocado, tomato, onion and mayonnaise. Chorillana’ is another Chilean dish, which is basically ‘loaded’ French fries topped with cooked mince, fried onion and a fried egg.

### Wine

Chile’s vineyards are challenging the more established players in the wine industry and Chilean wines are now recognised as some of the best in the world. Chile is the primary producer of carménère, a grape variety known for producing red wines with a distinct peppery note.

Carménère originated from the Bordeaux region of France. Before the 1870s, carménère was the most common blending grape in Bordeaux; however, due to a phylloxera infestation, nearly all the carménère vines – along with most of the vineyards in Bordeaux – were wiped out. When winemakers in Bordeaux replanted, they chose the more easily grown cabernet sauvignon and merlot grape varieties instead, and carménère was thought to be on the verge of extinction.

Carménère was first brought to Chile in the mid-1800s and was thought to be merlot because the carménère vines were often planted alongside merlot vines and the grapes blended together with the other varieties. In 1994, the French ampelographer (grape botany expert), Jean-Michel Boursiquot, noticed how the fruit on some of the ‘merlot’ vines took much longer to ripen.

He subsequently carried out research and found that almost 50 per cent of the merlot variety planted in Chile was actually the long-lost carménère variety of Bordeaux. In 1998, Chile officially recognised carménère as a separate variety. Try carménère while in Chile, it has an interesting story and is also delicious!



## South America Pre-Departure Guide

### Language

Spanish is the official language of Chile with over 85 per cent of the population speaking Spanish as their first language. The Spanish spoken in Chile is quite distinct from the Spanish spoken in neighbouring countries due to the heavy use of local slang, and a fast-paced delivery with 'lazy' pronunciation.

There is very little differentiation between the accents in the north and south of the country. Several indigenous languages are spoken in Chile including Mapudungun, Quechua, Aymara, Huilliche and Rapa Nui.

### National Holidays

New Year, Holy Week, Labour Day, Naval Battle of Iquique, St Peter and St Paul, Assumption of the Virgin, Independence Day, Army Day, (Hispanic) Columbus Day or Race Day, All Saints' Day, Immaculate Conception Day, Christmas Day



# South America Pre-Departure Guide



## Colombia - General Information

**Population:** approximately 49 million

**Capital:** Bogotá

The population of Colombia is 48.9 million, with a population growth rate of 0.85 per cent. Colombia, which is fast becoming South America's hottest travel destination, not only offers beautiful colonial architecture and Caribbean resorts, but a rich and fascinating history. Colombia is a country of great contrast. Its Caribbean coast possesses the highest coastal mountain range in the world, Pico Simon Bolivar and Pico Cristobal Colon at 5,775 metres (3,588 feet), as well as lush rainforest and stark but beautiful desert in the far north-east. The Andes runs from south to north creating habitats of forests, Paramo, and snow-capped mountains. To the east are the expansive flatlands of Los Llanos and further south the Amazon jungle. To the west the Pacific hosting the route for the humpback whales' migratory journey from July to November.

From the beautiful town of Cartagena on the Caribbean coast to salt cathedrals and archaeological parks – not forgetting the country's vibrant capital, Bogotá, cradled by the Andean mountains – Colombia does not disappoint.

The diverse topography and climate of Colombia means it has some of the greatest biodiversity on the planet and while the country covers only 0.8 per cent of the earth's surface, 10 per cent of the world's known endemic species are found in Colombia. The country is also home to some of the world's rarest birds.

Colombia boasts the world's highest coastal mountain ranges in the snow-covered peaks of Los Nevados in the Coffee Region and el Cocuy in Santander, and the vast expansive plains of Los Llanos that extend east into Venezuela. The Amazon River and rainforest are largely undeveloped in Colombia. Deserts can be found in Tatacoa in the south and also in La Guajira, the northern most point of the South American continent.

The beaches of Colombia are as varied as the country itself and, with a hot sunny climate, are the perfect places to relax after time spent exploring. The Caribbean island of Providencia is delightfully undeveloped with its pristine waters and laid-back lifestyle and with its larger and more developed sister island of San Andres, offers some of the finest diving in all South America.

The Pacific coast with its dark sandy beaches is home to comfortable but simple eco-hotels and a perfect location from which to watch the whales, go diving off the islands of Gorgona or Malpelo, and explore the pristine nature of the rainforest. There are also river beaches on the Amazon, ideal for getting close to monkeys and spotting pink river dolphins! The mighty Pacific Ocean washes the black sands and rainforest-fringed coastline, which is exceptionally rich and varied flora and fauna. Stretching from Panama to the Ecuadorian border and recording some of the highest amounts of rainfall in the world, this is also where humpback whales come to breed and turtles to lay their eggs.

More than 130,000 species of plants have been identified in Colombia, but it is predicted that when the region has been thoroughly explored that number may be doubled. At the highest elevation of 3,000–4,600 metres (10,000–15,000 feet) and coldest level of mountain meadows, called páramos, the soil supports grasses, small herbaceous plants and dense masses of low bushes.

Animal life is abundant, especially in the tropical area. Among carnivorous species are puma, a variety of smaller cats; raccoons, and mustelids (weasel family). Herbivores include the tapir, peccary, deer and large tropical rodents. Sloths, anteaters, opossums and several types of monkey are also found, as well as some 1,665 species and subspecies of South American and migratory birds.

Increasing deforestation during the latter 20th century had a negative impact on the many bird species that were known to have thrived in the northern Andes rainforests a century ago, including the yellow-eared parrot, which now ranks among the world's most critically endangered species. Other endangered animals include the giant armadillo, the cotton-top marmoset, the white-footed tamarin, the tapir, the condor and the caiman.

Another threat to Colombia's plants and animals is the illegal trade in endangered species. Birds such as parrots, toucans and macaws, and mammals including the golden lion tamarin, marmosets, ocelots and margay cats, are smuggled out of the country, often flown on the same clandestine flights used for smuggling drugs.

# South America Pre-Departure Guide

## Interesting Facts

- Colombia was named after the great explorer Christopher Columbus.
- Colombia is the only country in South America with a coastline on both the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean Sea.
- Colombia is part of the Ring of Fire, a region of the world subject to earthquakes and volcanic eruptions.

## History

When the Spanish first arrived, the largest and widespread culture was the Chibchas. The Chibchas were concentrated in the highland basins and valleys of the Cordillera Oriental.

The first Spanish settlement was established in 1510 on the coast of the Gulf of Urabá (Caribbean Sea) but was abandoned after a few years. Santa Marta and Cartagena (founded in 1525 and 1533, respectively) were the earliest permanent settlements. Bogotá was founded in 1538, followed by more than 20 other settlements by the middle of the 16th century. About the same time, the Spanish moving northward from Peru, reached southern Colombia and founded Pasto and Popayán.

Spanish settlement expanded during the 17th century, stimulated by the presence of gold and silver. Gradually, an increasing number of settlers turned to agriculture. Large estates were established using the indigenous people and later Africans, as slave labour, especially in the cultivation of coffee.

Colombia was part of the territory known as the Viceroyalty of Nueva Granada (established in 1740), which also extended across present-day Panama, Venezuela and Ecuador. The population of Colombia was estimated at approximately 800,000 in 1770. It is believed to have exceeded one million early in the 19th century.

In 1811, the population in parts of Colombia rebelled against Spanish colonial rule. A period of armed struggle followed. 'Greater Colombia', the independence of which was declared in 1819, included the former Viceroyalty. It dissolved in 1830, when Venezuela and Ecuador declared their independence. Colombia and Panama became the Republic of New Granada.

Political and economic rivalry between the different social groups plunged the republic into a long period of instability with intermittent civil wars and dictatorships.

This continued into the 20th century. In an attempt to overcome regional conflict and dissension, the country was given a new constitution and, in 1863, became a federation of nine states called the United States of Colombia.

In 1886, a new constitution abolished the federation and divided Colombia into 'departments' with some local autonomy. In 1903, Panama withdrew from Colombia and declared its independence.

## Economy

Colombia's natural resources include natural gas, coal, iron ore, nickel, gold, copper and emeralds. Colombia also produces petroleum and generates hydroelectricity.

Tourism continues to play a substantial role in the economy's growth and looks likely to play an increasingly important role in the future as it grew 95 per cent between 2010 and 2016, and Colombia received over five million international visitors in 2018.

## People

Colombia is one of the most Spanish of all South American nations, although persons of pure Spanish descent constitute only 20 per cent of the population.

The mestizos (people of European, particularly Spanish, and indigenous Amerindian descent) comprise 58 per cent. The 'mulattos' (people of African and European descent) make up 14 per cent, and those of African descent are only four per cent of the population. The 'zambos' (those of mixed African and Amerindian origins) comprise three per cent of Colombia's people.

## Religion

Colombia is ethnically diverse, but religiously homogenous. Presently, roughly 90 per cent of the population adheres to Christianity while 85 per cent are overwhelmingly Roman Catholic. According to Colombia's constitution and other laws and policies, the country protects religious freedom and prohibits religious discrimination.

## Cultural Customs

Whenever you travel to a foreign country, you are a guest in that country. Aurora Expeditions would like every visitor to Colombia to enjoy their experience to the fullest, but also reminds them to be respectful of local culture and customs. Like any other country you visit, respect the privacy of local people, especially when entering their homes or wanting to photograph them.

One thing to take into consideration in Colombia is the drinking culture. It is widely accepted that you may sit down and discuss the day's happenings over a beer or aguardiente.

Care must be taken around army bases or military locations and personnel – especially with photography. As a rule, the Colombian military and police force are incredibly friendly and happy to converse. You must; however, be courteous when approaching such personnel.

Be aware that you may be stopped at military or police checkpoints. There is no need to panic or worry. These checkpoints are for your safety. The guards may want to check your passport, but it is more likely that they want the opportunity to practise their English! These are standard procedures and if greeted politely and sensibly, you will pass through without issue and with yet another memory of quirky Colombia.

## Transport

Taxis are widely available throughout Colombia, especially in the main cities, and are an economical way of getting around. Licensed vehicles are bright yellow in colour and are generally easy to hail from the street as they pass. In most major cities, taxis have digital meters to track the journey with the exception of Cartagena, Santa Marta and Barranquilla. In these cities, visitors will have to negotiate the cost of any journey before getting into the vehicle. The potential for overcharging is obviously much greater in such circumstances.

To minimise the risk of this, consider asking the hotel/local restaurant staff or other locals what a reasonable price for the journey should be before entering negotiations with your driver.

Bogotá and Medellín offer other public transport options for getting around. Bogotá has the TransMilenio service, which is the city's main bus transit system offering many connections throughout the district. Each station displays large maps of the bus routes with public service employees available to offer help.

Fares are best paid in cash. Other cities that have a similar bus transit system to Bogotá's TransMilenio, include Medellín (Metroplús), Cali (MetroCali), Pereira (Megabús), Bucaramanga (Metrolínea), Cartagena (Transcaribe) and Barranquilla (Transmetro). Medellín takes pride in its Metro as it is the only city in the country to have an above-ground railway system and perhaps the most commonly used public transport service after its cable-car network (offering fantastic views of the entire city) and the newly designed Tranvia.

Use of mobile apps such as Uber, Easy Taxi and Tapsi is also incredibly prevalent in most major Colombian cities. In of 2017, Uber began operating in Bogotá, Cartagena, Cali, Medellín, Santa Marta, Armenia, Pereira, Manizales,

Barranquilla, Bucaramanga, Popayán, Villavicencio and Valledupar.

## Security and Crime

Common sense should be used when visiting any foreign country and Colombia is no exception. But for all its bad publicity, Colombia is generally very safe. As in any capital city or large city, care must be taken not to 'Dar Papaya'. In other words, do not give anyone the opportunity to see your apparent wealth.

Care must be taken at night hailing taxis from the street. Always try and call a taxi, either from your hotel or the restaurant or bar you are visiting.

Always use the safe deposit box in your hotel room or at the hotel reception. Never carry your passport with you during day trips or walking about day or night, but always carry a photo copy in case of police checks etc.

## Time Zone

Colombia is in Greenwich Meantime GMT-5



## South America Pre-Departure Guide

### Money

The local currency of Colombia is the peso (COP). The official symbol for the peso is \$.

Credits cards are accepted in hotels and some restaurants. All major banks in Colombia generally accept worldwide debit cards (i.e. Visa). ATMs (cajeros automaticos) are plentiful in major cities.

Be aware that the more rural the location, the greater the risk of some ATMs not accepting your card. It is always a good idea to contact your bank and credit card provider to advise them that you will be using your card in Colombia.

Bank opening hours are usually Monday to Friday: 9.00 am–4.00 pm. Saturday: 9.00 am–11.30 am

Please check websites such as [www.oanda.com](http://www.oanda.com) or [www.xe.com](http://www.xe.com) for up-to-date exchange rates prior to your departure.

### Shopping

Colombia is famous for its emeralds. Although you may be very tempted to buy from the man on the street at a 'good' price, but we recommend you ask your local guide for advice on the most reputable places to buy emeralds.

Throughout Colombia you will find a grand selection of local handicrafts including handwoven baskets and hats; and handmade pottery. You can buy a different hat for every region during your trip! Hammocks are always a good buy, especially on the coast. Leather is also a desired handicraft given its high-end quality. There is a range of genuine leather workshops and retailers in Medellín and Bogotá, one being Mario Hernandez, which is a high-end specialty leather provider and Vélez, a traditional leather-based product store. Both offer an array of options such as purses, bags, belts and wallets.

Bogotá and Medellín have excellent shopping malls where you can find everything from Ralph Lauren to Dunkin' Donuts. The shopping centres have food courts, internet access and ATMs.



### Tipping and Gifts

In many restaurants in Colombia a service charge will have already been added to the bill, or you will be asked if you want the servicio or propina to be included. There is no need to pay a tip unless you feel one is warranted.

You may want to tip guides and drivers during your journey but again, only do so if you feel the person providing the service warrants it.

Consideration must be given when handing out gifts, especially to children. Pens, pencils and paper are a good idea; money is not. Unfortunately, gifts of money can encourage children to become dependent on foreign travellers. A piece of food is always an option, although sweets may not be the perfect choice for a child who does not have access to good healthcare or even a toothbrush.

The best way to contribute to Colombia is through a recognised charity.

### Electricity

Electricity in Colombia is 110 volts.

### Long-Distance Dialling, Emergency Numbers, Internet

Country code: + 57

National Emergency Number (24-hour general line): 123  
Ambulance: 132

Police: 112

Internet cafés are widespread across all major cities in Colombia and smaller towns tend to have at least one internet cafe. Connections are usually fast and cheap. Wi-fi is also becoming increasingly common not only in hotels, but also in shopping centres, restaurants and cafés in major cities.



# South America Pre-Departure Guide

## Climate

The climate throughout Colombia can vary almost every day due to its diverse geography. In the Andean mountains there is a high chance of rain throughout the year. Along the Caribbean coast the weather is consistently warm, with occasional outbreaks of heavy showers.

Through the central Cordillera, the days can be warm but temperatures can drop considerably at night. There are two seasons in Colombia, which have been affected by El Niño – dry and wet. Dry season runs from December to January and July to August. The rainy or wet season occurs between April – May and October – November.

Visit Tourism Colombia's website for detailed information on the country's diverse climate – <http://www.colombia.travel/en/practical-information/climate>

## Clothing

Given the variation in altitude, you will need to be prepared for several changes of climate throughout your journey.

A good pair of walking shoes or sturdy trainers (sneakers) is advisable for walking in and around the cobbled streets of some of the colonial towns, and the grassy (and sometimes muddy) terrain of the Coffee Region. A good pair of thick socks always provides extra comfort when walking longer distances.

Even though you hope not to use it, a lightweight waterproof jacket is a must, together with a sweater/fleece for the evenings. A long-sleeved shirt is also very useful during the day against the potentially strong sun, or the evening mosquitoes.

A sunhat and sunglasses are a must for both the Andean sun and the coast, together with a good quality sunscreen.

On the coastal section of your trip, lightweight natural fibres can be more comfortable than synthetic. If wearing shorts and shirt then you must always remember to apply sunscreen. There may be shade in the old streets of Cartagena, but it can still be very easy to get caught out.

Comfortable sandals with Velcro strap are advisable.

All though dress codes in Colombia are fairly liberal, conservative clothing should be worn when entering religious and/or government buildings. Shorts are NOT permitted in official government buildings.

## Language

Spanish is the official language of Colombia. An increasing number of people are learning English and other foreign languages such as German and French. Only in the major cities will you find the majority of bilingual Colombians.

The languages of the country's ethnic groups are constitutionally recognised as official languages in their territories. In places with non-Spanish language traditions, bilingual education is obligatory. More than 60 indigenous languages exist today.

## Music

The music of Colombia contains diverse music genres, both traditional and modern, depending where you are in the country, and it is not uncommon to find different musical styles in the same region. The diversity in musical expression found in Colombia can be seen as the result of a mix of African, indigenous, European (especially Spanish) influences, as well as more modern US and Caribbean musical forms, such as Trinidadian, Cuban and Jamaican.

The music genres of the Caribbean are rich in diversity. Cumbia is a blend of Spanish and African sounds and the dance recalls the shackles worn around the ankles of slaves. Vallenato was spawned in Valledupar where the Vallenato festival is held every year. The music is based around the accordion and has long been connected with Cumbia. Other music genres that can typically be heard in the Caribbean are Colombian Salsa, porro, gaita, merecumbe and champeta.

Other music genres from Colombia include currulao (Pacific coast); bambuco, carranga, pasillo, vals (Andean region); and joropo (Los Llanos), which is a mix of harp, maracas, guitar, a small ukulele-like instrument and a tiple.

Reggaeton, originally from Puerto Rico, has become very popular over the last several years, with its eclectic mix of hip-hop, Latin groove and rhythm. Colombian artists who have established themselves quite well in this genre include J. Balvin and Maluma.

### The Arts

Religious themes dominated much of Colombia's artistic scene prior to independence, with the Bogotá-based Gregorio Vásquez de Arce y Ceballos (1638–1711). These are now found in many of the fine art museums and cathedrals, particularly in Bogotá. Colombian artists became more experimental after independence.

With European influences, art in Colombia became more creative and original. At the forefront of this, were painters and sculptors such as Luis Alberto Acuña, Pedro Nel Gómez, and the most celebrated monument creator, Rodrigo Arenas Betancur.

Following the footsteps of these great masters hailed Colombia's most internationally- renowned artist, Fernando Botero. The Medellín-born painter and sculptor has become famous for his exaggerated elements depicting influences from his own traditional upbringing, small-town Colombian life, political figures, military men to criminals, prostitutes and nudes.

Botero has donated many of his paintings to the public, including a large collection to the National Museum of Colombia. Twenty-three sculptures stand proudly in the Plaza Botero in front of the museum of Antioquia, which is also the recipient of donations from Medellín's favourite child.

By far the biggest influence on Colombian fiction was the publication of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel García Márquez. Márquez won the 1982 Nobel Prize in Literature and his work has been critically acclaimed throughout the world. His novel, *Love in the Time of Cholera*, was made into a successful film directed by Mike Newell in 2007.

Laura Restrepo has been acclaimed as one of the best South American writers for her vivid depictions of the Colombian conflict and the effects that violence can have on society and on individuals, as illustrated in her powerful novel, *Delirium*. Like Restrepo, Evelio Rosero, a National Literature Prize winner and celebrated Colombian writer, has also explored Colombia's tumultuous and violent history through his most impactful novel, *The Armies*.

Another present-day star of the literary world is John Jairo Junieles, a young Colombian poet who has won considerable acclaim since winning the 2006 II Ciudad Alajuela International Poetry Award in Costa Rica with his book *Passenger With a Ticket*.



## South America Pre-Departure Guide

### Cuisine

Colombian cuisine is characterised by a blend of European, African and indigenous cuisine.

Although there is no defined national dish, there are many candidates including bandeja paisa, ajiaco, sancocho, arepa, tamales and lechona.

Bogotá and the central Andean region are famous for ajiaco, a soup made of chicken, corn, potatoes, avocado, and guasca, a local herb. Traditionally, cream and capers are added at the table before eating. Ajiaco is served with white rice, salad with a hint of lemon; avocado, or sweet or salty tostadas and is a hearty dish for the cold mountain evenings.

Empanadas, a traditional Colombian snack, with ají salsa and fresh natural juice.

Along the Caribbean coast seafood delicacies such as fish and lobster are the typical dishes. Coconut rice is a common dish in the coastal cities. Suero, which is a cross between yoghurt and sour cream, is widely consumed and was introduced by Arab immigrants in Barranquilla and other coastal cities. The arepa, a corn-based bread, takes many forms in the Caribbean region including: arepa limpia, arepa con huevo (arepa with egg) and arepa con queso (arepa with cheese).

Bandeja paisa, a traditional dish from the Paisa region, consists of white rice, red beans, ground beef, plantain, morcilla (blood sausage with rice), chorizo, arepa, avocado and a fried egg.

Sancocho is a popular soup originating from the Cauca Valley region. It combines vegetables with poultry or fish and while recipes can differ from one region to another, they usually all contain yuca and maize and are frequently eaten with slices of banana.

Main cities such as Bogotá, Medellín, Cartagena and Barranquilla, have excellent selections of vegetarian cuisine; however, the farther you venture out into the countryside, the more difficult it will become to find vegetarian options. Many vegetarian restaurants can be found in Colombia's major cities.

Other recommendations include BioPlaza (Bogotá), Verdeo (Medellín), El Huerto (Barranquilla) and El Bistrot (Cartagena). In general, most restaurants in the main cities offer several vegetarian options or can modify a dish to make it vegetarian-friendly.

Aguapanela is popular refreshment in Colombia and some neighbouring countries. Aguapanela is made by dissolving a piece of sugar cane in water and adding lime juice. Cheese is sometimes served with aguapanela and can either be eaten within the aguapanela or as a snack on the side.

Beer is very popular in Colombia. A wide range of beers is brewed in Colombia and while they all have their origins in particular regions, they are available throughout the country.

The other local brews are rum and aguardiente. Ron de Caldas is generally considered the finest rum in Colombia, even winning a prize in Belgium in 2005.

Aguardiente is alcoholic drink derived from sugar cane. It ranges from 20–40 per cent proof and is widely consumed at Colombian parties. It is not uncommon to see glasses of water also on the table – to quash the fire! The most common brands of aguardiente are Antioqueña and Cristal.

When it comes to coffee, Juan Valdez Cafe is probably the best-known coffee retailer in Colombia, a business which started in 1959 and has been successfully promoting Colombian coffee ever since.

While bottled water is ideally the safer option to drink while in Colombia, tap water in Bogotá, Medellín, the Coffee Region and Bucaramanga is considered perfectly safe to drink.

### National Holidays

New Year, Epiphany Day, St Joseph's Day, Holy Week, Labour Day, Ascension Day, Corpus Christi, Sacred Heart, Feast of Saint Peter and Saint Paul, Independence Day, Battle of Boyaca Day, Assumption of Mary, Columbus Day, All Saint's Day, Independence of Cartagena, Feast of the Immaculate Conception, Christmas Day

# South America Pre-Departure Guide



## Ecuador - General Information

**Population:** approximately 16.6 million

**Capital:** Quito

The Galápagos Islands are located west of Ecuador and are renowned for being home to many fascinating species of wildlife, including lava lizards, red and blue-footed boobies and the giant tortoise. They are one of the world's foremost destinations for wildlife encounters with many of the plant and animal species being found nowhere else in the world.

The urban jewel of mainland Ecuador is Quito, with its wonderful colonial architecture and set amid the Andean mountains. Often used a stopover point en route to visit the Galápagos Islands, Quito is worth taking the time to explore. Beyond Quito, the culture and scenery of the highlands is captivating as Quichua-speaking communities retain many of their traditional customs in the shadow of snow-capped mountains and volcanoes.

The eastern part of Ecuador has some of the highest biodiversity on the planet contained in the Amazon jungle region.

## Interesting Facts

- Ecuador is the home of the famous Panama hat. These hats were originally made in Ecuador and shipped to the Panama Canal for worldwide distribution, hence the name.
- Volcan Wolf on the island of Isabela is the highest point of the Galápagos at 1,707 metres (5,600 feet) above sea level.
- Quito, along with Krakow, was the first World Heritage Cultural Site to be declared by UNESCO in 1978.

## Time Zone

Ecuador is in Greenwich Meantime GMT-5

Galápagos Islands are in Greenwich Meantime GMT-6

## Money

The unit of currency in Ecuador and on the Galápagos Islands is the US dollar.

Since Ecuador adopted the US dollar as official currency, currency exchange services (casas de cambio) have become few and far between. The remaining exchange services generally open from 9.00 am to 6.00 pm Monday to Friday and until midday on Saturdays. The only foreign currencies that are easy to change within the country are euros, Peruvian soles and Colombian nuevos soles.

Banks only open from 9.00 am until 1.00 or 1.30 pm Monday to Friday and are closed at weekends.

ATMs (cajeros automaticos) are plentiful in major cities such as Quito or Guayaquil and in large towns such as Otavalo, Baños and Cuenca. They are less common in smaller towns and more remote parts of the country.

The ATMs generally only recognise four-digit pins. Cards that are most widely accepted are Visa and Mastercard with a daily withdrawal limit of US\$200. If you are taking a Galápagos cruise, please check the boat document we provide, which will tell you if your vessel accepts credit/debit cards or cash only for onboard purchases.

Please check websites such as [www.oanda.com](http://www.oanda.com) or [www.xe.com](http://www.xe.com) for up-to-date exchange rates prior to your departure.

## Business Hours

Shops are open Monday to Friday 9:00 am–1.00 pm and 3.00 pm–7.00 pm; and Saturday 9.00 am–1.00 pm.

Most supermarkets do not close before 8.00 pm and are also open on Sundays.

Banks open from Mon-Fri 9:00am – 3:00pm.

## Electricity Voltage

Electrical outlets in Ecuador deliver 110 volts. Some major hotels may also have 220-volt outlets; however, it is advisable to bring your own multi-adapter or converter.

## Long-Distance Dialling, Emergency Numbers, Internet

Country code: + 593

Ambulance: 131

Police: 101

Police (Quito): 911

Police (Guayaquil, Cuenca, Loja): 112

Internet cafés can be found throughout Ecuador although they are not as common as they used to be. Wi-fi is becoming increasingly common in many hotels and guesthouses, shopping malls, airports and some restaurants. Please be aware that Wi-Fi is not always free.

## Climate

Ecuador has different climate regions ranging from subtropical and tropical to cool temperate.

Subtropical and even tropical climate conditions are found on the western slopes of the Andes. There is a wet season between January and May, and a dry season lasting from June to December. The average temperature is around 25–30°C (77–86°F).

The climate of the mountain valleys of the Sierra is temperate. Heavy rain during the afternoon is not uncommon and nights are cold – e.g. Quito has an average temperature of 8–21°C (46–70°F). The eastern slopes and the rainforest are humid and warm.

In the highlands, the dry season runs from June until the end of September. In the Amazon basin it rains during most months, but August and December to March are usually the driest. On the coast, the wet season (January to May) sees sunny days with showers every day – usually in the afternoon. This is the best beach weather as during the dry season (June to December) the weather is cooler and usually overcast.

The recommended time for swimming is from November to April. Those who love hiking in the highlands should travel from June to November. The best time to travel to regions close to the Amazon is between August and May.

The Galápagos is a place that can be visited at any time of year and although it is located on the Equator, the weather is not tropical. The warmest time of year is December to May when the sky is always clear and the sun shines strongly. Temperatures range from 21–30°C (69–84°F). Between June and November, the temperatures are a little cooler. If you love to dive, this is the best time to visit as you will have a better chance to observe the marine life that Galápagos is famous for.

Dry season is from June to December, when the southern trade winds bring the colder Humboldt Current north to the Galápagos. This means the water is cooler and a layer of high atmosphere mist pervades the island skies.

**The water temperature varies during the year:**

January to June: 21–27°C (70–80°F)

July to December: 18–23°C (65–75°F)

## Clothing to Pack

Due to the different climate regions in Ecuador you should pack both summer and winter clothing. Be aware that the nights can actually be cold.

Those intending to stay in the Amazon rainforest or on the Galápagos Islands, should pack light comfortable clothes, hat, swimsuit, long-sleeved shirts, raincoat, sunglasses and sunscreen, binoculars and a torch. Visitors should also note that Ecuadorians like to dress smartly when going out to dinner.



# South America Pre-Departure Guide

## Cuisine

Ecuadorian cuisine is diverse and regional. The potato plays an important role in many Ecuadorian dishes, – especially in the Andes – and over 200 varieties of potato are grown in Ecuador. In the mountainous areas, meat (beef, pork, chicken and guinea pig) is served with rice, corn and potatoes.

In the southern mountainous regions, a typical dish is a soup prepared from green bananas and roasted pork. In the Amazon, the dietary staple is the yucca or cassava, a starchy root vegetable that is peeled and then boiled or fried and used in a variety of dishes. In coastal regions shellfish, shrimp and various types of fish are important ingredients for many dishes.

Pan de yucca (a light bread filled with cheese) is found throughout Ecuador and freshly squeezed fruit juices are also common.

A typical lunch or almuerzo, consists of soup and then chunks of grilled meat served on rice and accompanied by a pulse-based sauce and fried plantain.

Some typical Ecuadorian dishes include:

**Patacones** – green plantains sliced and fried twice

**Llapingachos** – potato cakes stuffed with cheese, fried and served with a peanut sauce

**Seco de chivo** – goat stew, generally served with rice and fried plantain

The most popular national alcoholic beverage is aguardiente, a spirit made from sugar cane. Canelazo is a drink made from aguardiente.

## Language

Spanish is the official language of Ecuador and while it is the most widely spoken language in the country, there are three regional variations: Equatorial Pacific Spanish, Andean Spanish and Amazonian Spanish.

They are, however, all very similar. Ecuador is in fact one of the best places in South America to learn Spanish as Ecuadorian Spanish is spoken slowly and clearly. The indigenous population speaks Quechua as well as Spanish.

## National Holidays

New Year, Carnival, Holy Week, Labour Day, The Battle of Pichincha, Independence Day, Independence of Guayaquil, All Soul's Day, Independence of Cuenca, Christmas Day



## South America Pre-Departure Guide



### The Guianas - General Information

**Population:** approximately 297,000

**Capital:** Georgetown

The Guianas have a rich cultural heritage with its roots deep in indigenous culture and fused with influences from around the world. When you add the biodiversity and unparalleled wildlife-viewing opportunities to be had in the Guianas, the result is three exciting destinations to explore. Guyana offers the lively capital of Georgetown, Kaieteur Falls (the largest single-drop waterfall in the world), and Iwokrama Rainforest Reserve with its forest canopy walkway and opportunities to see giant river otters, turtles, anteaters, the hoatzin (national bird) and maybe even the elusive jaguar.

French Guiana offers its colourful capital, Cayenne, rich in French colonial architecture; the Space Centre at Kourou, the vibrant Sunday market in the Laos Hmong village of Cacao and of course, the infamous islands of Îles du Salut, the penal colony immortalised in the novel and movie, Papillon. In Suriname, the capital Paramaribo is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and not to be missed. Also worth visiting is the Jewish settlement of Jodensavanne, its former plantations taking you back to colonial times, and of course the UNESCO Central Suriname Nature Reserve, which is home to a vast array of flora and fauna, is a must.

### Interesting Facts

- Cayenne pepper is named after Cayenne, the capital of French Guiana.
- Kaieteur Falls in Guyana is the largest single-drop waterfall in the world in terms of the volume of water flowing over it.
- Suriname is the only country in South America where Dutch is the official language.

### Money

The unit of currency in Guyana is the Guyana dollar (GYD); in French Guiana it is the euro (EUR); and in Suriname, it is the Suriname dollar (SRD).

**Guyana:** The Guyana dollar is a stable currency linked to the US dollar, which is also widely accepted here. Some higher-end hotels and restaurants will accept credit cards but there is usually a five per cent service fee. Some ATMs will accept foreign cards, but these are mostly located in Georgetown. Foreign currency can be exchanged at banks and currency exchange services as well as at some hotels. A small commission applies.

**Suriname:** Although the official unit of currency is the Suriname dollar, some businesses quote prices in euros and/or US dollars. Most banks will exchange major foreign currencies but there are also ATMs that accept foreign cards. Generally, only large hotels and travel agencies accept credit cards and a service fee will be charged.

**French Guiana:** French Guiana is one of the most expensive countries in South America, partly because it uses the euro and partly because many goods are imported from France. The only currency exchange service available is in Cayenne, but there are ATMs in most mid-sized and large towns where you can obtain a cash advance using Visa or Mastercard. Credit cards are widely accepted.

Please check websites such as [www.oanda.com](http://www.oanda.com) or [www.xe.com](http://www.xe.com) for up-to-date exchange rates prior to your departure.



## South America Pre-Departure Guide

### Climate

Guyana has a tropical climate and is hot and humid throughout the year. Average daytime temperatures are 28°C (82.4°F) with temperatures seldom rising above 34°C (93.2°F) during the day, or falling below 25°C (77°F) at night. There are two wet and two dry seasons. The first wet season, from mid-November to mid-January is typified by long heavy showers. The second wet season from May until mid-August has less intense regular downfalls. September and October are usually the driest months.

French Guiana is also tropical with a wet and a dry season. The average temperature hovers around 27°C (80.6°F) throughout the year. The wet season starts in late November to early December and runs to July, with May having the highest monthly rainfall and March usually the lowest.

Suriname has a tropical climate and is warm and humid year-round. There are two wet and two dry seasons, but there is often rain during the dry season and there may be little or no rain in the wet season! The average annual daily temperature is 27°C (80.6°F) and maximum temperatures rarely rise above 32°C (89.6°F).

### Time Zone

French Guiana is in Greenwich Meantime GMT-3

Guyana is in Greenwich Meantime GMT-3

Suriname is in Greenwich Meantime GMT-3

### Cuisine

**Guyana:** The food in Guyana is varied and includes curries and roti, Guyanese-style chow mein, pepperpot (an Amerindian meat stew) and cassava bread. The national dish is the one-pot meal and the most popular drink is dark rum.

**French Guiana:** The cuisine of French Guiana is again diverse and can be quite spicy. A traditional dish is bouillon d'aoura prepared with smoked fish and flavoured with aurora fruit. Pimentade is fish with a tomato sauce, spiced and seasoned with lemon.

**Suriname:** Surinamese cuisine includes roti, nasi goreng, the casserole pom and chicken masala.

### Language

Guyana is the only English-speaking country in South America. Although English is the official language, most of the population speak Guyanese Creole.

French Guiana has French as its official language although a number of other languages are spoken, including Creole, Amerindian languages, Maroon dialects and Hmong Njua.

Suriname has Dutch as its official language and it is spoken by the majority of the population. Sranang Tongo, a local Creole language, was suppressed by the Dutch for many years but is now also widely used.



# South America Pre-Departure Guide



## Peru - General Information

**Population:** approximately 32.2 million

**Capital:** Lima

Peru is a mecca for archaeologists and researchers who continue to uncover over 20,000 years of Peruvian history – a history that began even before the magnificent Inca Empire, as can be seen through the artefacts of the first inhabitants of the Andes in Ayacucho (19,500 BC), the citadel of Caral (3,000 BC), the royal tombs of Sipan (about 100 AD), the lines of the Nazca culture (200 BC–900 AD), etc. and continuing on through the colonial and republican periods.

Peru is also one of the most geo-diverse places on the planet in that you can travel from an arid desert to soaring mountain ranges to a lush tropical forest in the blink of an eye. The country's three regions (coastal, highland and tropical forest) contain a wide variety of ecosystems with unparalleled biodiversity, including over 60 protected natural areas covering approximately 15 per cent of the country.

This geographic diversity, as well as the cold waters of the Pacific Ocean, are an important source of a wide variety of fresh produce that is transformed into gastronomic masterpieces by chefs to delight those who appreciate fine food. To eat in Peru is a fascinating journey into the culinary legacy left behind by the immigrant populations that have arrived throughout the country's history, each one leaving an indelible mark on Peruvian cuisine.

Peru offers limitless opportunities for adventurers or for travellers who desire to energise themselves through the mysticism of Andean culture, or even those who simply want to relax. The possibilities in Peru are enormous, thanks to a growing, thriving hotel industry and an excellent infrastructure for tourism.

Scenically breathtaking, Peru is undoubtedly one of the highlight destinations of South America. It is often compared to Egypt because of the large number of historical sites and ruins from ancient cultures that stretch from the Norte Chico to the Inca Empire. Most famous of all is of course Machu Picchu, the Lost City of the Incas.

Then there is the vast ancient city of Chan Chan, the largest pre-Hispanic city in the Americas. Also fascinating and still an unsolved mystery are the Nazca lines, enormous geoglyphs etched into the desert. There are colourful markets such as Pisac and of course, Lake Titicaca, the highest navigable lake in the world and the largest lake in South America.

Titicaca is home to the Uros people who have lived on the lake for centuries, constructing their homes from the totora reeds that grow in the lake. For wildlife enthusiasts there is the Amazon rainforest, the Ballestas Islands, and the Colca Canyon where the majestic Andean condors soar.

## Interesting Facts

- The source of the Amazon River is in Peru at 5,316 metres (17,440 feet) above sea level.
- Lima is the second largest capital city (after Cairo) to be located in a desert.
- Peru is famous for the spirit pisco and the cocktail pisco sour.

## General Information

### Visiting Machu Picchu

Machu Picchu is one of the world's major tourist attractions and in 2007, it was given the title of one of the new Seven Wonders of the World. It was the US explorer and politician, Hiram Bingham, who rediscovered Machu Picchu, the Lost City of the Incas, in 1911 and brought it to the attention of the rest of the world.

Before visiting Machu Picchu, you are advised to spend a few days acclimatising in Cusco, the legendary capital of the Inca Empire at 3,400 metres (11,155 feet). You then have the option to trek all or part of the way to Machu Picchu, or alternatively take a train.

## South America Pre-Departure Guide

### Important Information for Visiting Machu Picchu

There are 500 permits available each day – approximately 200 are allocated to tourists and 300 to porters, cooks and guides. If all 500 permits have been sold, you will have to choose another date. If the permits have sold out for a particular date, then no trekking company will be able to offer you a place. Trekking companies cannot buy blocks of permits and sell them on at a later date.

Trek permits can only be bought using a tourist's name and passport number and these details cannot be changed after the permit has been bought. Even if there are cancellations those permits do not come back on to the market, so there is no waiting list option.

There are several options for trekking to the ruins. The Inca Trail is the most popular option as it is the only trek in the area that enters the ruins through the famous Sun Gate. This trek has options for a 4-day or a shorter 2-day hike and must be booked as early as possible to guarantee availability.

Alternative treks include the 4-day Lares Trek or the 5-day Salkantay Trek and although they do not arrive at Machu Picchu via the Sun Gate, they are still great options for trekking. For both of these treks you would catch the train for the final part of the journey to the ruins.

### Sample Itinerary

On a day trip visiting Machu Picchu from Cusco, you will be met early in the morning and transferred from your hotel to Poroy railway station to board the train for Machu Picchu. After an impressive train ride through mountain valleys, cloud forest and high rainforest (approx. 3–4 hours) you reach the town of Aguas Calientes, where a short bus ride takes you to this magnificent ruin.

For the energetic, there is the chance to climb the emblematic Huayna Picchu (Little Mountain) at additional charge. This must also be booked in advance – see notes below.

At the end of the day you descend by bus to the small town of Aguas Calientes to take the train back to Cusco or you have the option to overnight there.

Please note: Machu Picchu is open daily from 6.00 am to 5.30 pm. From January 2019, visits to Machu Picchu will be divided into morning and afternoon visits. Morning visits are between 6.00 am and 12.00 noon. Afternoon visits are between 12.00 pm and 5.30 pm – entry is not permitted after 4.00pm. The maximum time permitted for a visit to Machu Picchu citadel is four (4) hours.

Your ticket will be stamped to record your arrival time. You must have a guide for your first visit; however, a guide is not required for any subsequent visit. A ticket must be purchased for each visit and you will need to show your first ticket if unaccompanied by a guide on any subsequent visit.

If you are going back to Cusco the same day, you will need to:

- Leave in time to meet your train. The train usually departs Aguas Calientes to Cusco at 6.45 pm and it is necessary to get down to Aguas Calientes at least one hour prior to departure
- Be aware that toilets (small fee payable) and food stalls are outside the check point, so ensure you use the toilet and purchase snacks and drinks prior to entering the check point
- Treks up Huayna Picchu now incur a \$25 fee when booked at same time as the trek to Machu Picchu on a day trip, Lares or Salkantay Trek. If booked after the initial booking, the fee is \$70. If trekking the classic Inca Trail, the additional cost is \$83 if not booked in conjunction with the Inca Trail. Please let us know at the time of booking if you would like to hike this mountain. Places are extremely limited and are available on a first-come-first-served basis only!

If visiting Manu National Park, the yellow fever vaccine is mandatory as some cases of the disease have been reported in the area of the park located in Brazil. Please refer to your Inca Trail, Lares Trek or Salkantay Trek information sheet for more detailed information.



## Luggage Restrictions on Trains to Machu Picchu

**Please note:** If you are taking the train to Machu Picchu, you are only allowed to take one carry-on bag with you. Your bag must weigh no more than five (5) kilograms / 11 pounds and must measure no more than 157 linear centimetres / 5.15 feet (height + length + width)

Excess luggage can be stored at your hotel in Cusco. If you are transferring directly to the Sacred Valley from Cusco Airport, there are two options for excess luggage:

1. After checking into your hotel in the Sacred Valley, the driver will transfer your excess luggage.
2. Excess luggage may be stored at your hotel in the Sacred Valley. The driver will make a stop to collect the luggage on the way back from Ollantaytambo to Cusco.

Additional costs apply to either option. Please check with your travel consultant.

## Time Zone

Peru is in Greenwich Meantime GMT-5

## Money

The unit of currency in Peru is the Peruvian nuevo sol (PEN).

ATMs (cajeros automaticos) are abundant in all major cities and so withdrawing money is not a problem in Peru. ATMs generally allow you to withdraw cash in either Peruvian soles or US dollars and instructions can be accessed in English as well as Spanish.

The US dollar is accepted in many stores throughout the country and prices are often expressed in both US dollars and soles.

Major currencies can be exchanged in a variety of places such as banks, currency exchange services (casas de cambio) and hotels, although the rate in hotels is generally lower. The rate depends on the amount of money to be exchanged and can often be higher mid-week than at weekends.

Currency exchange services tend to have longer opening hours than banks and are generally faster. Most banks are closed on Saturday afternoons from 1.00 pm and on Sundays.

Do not tender or accept damaged banknotes as they are unlikely to be accepted by Peruvians. You are advised not to change money on the street as counterfeiting is a problem.

Debit and credit cards are also widely accepted in Peru and can often be used in major hotels, restaurants and shops.

Please check websites such as [www.oanda.com](http://www.oanda.com) or [www.xe.com](http://www.xe.com) for up-to-date exchange rates prior to your departure.

## Long-Distance Dialling, Emergency Numbers, Internet

Country code: + 51 Ambulance: 117

Police: 105

Most regions of Peru have excellent internet connections and internet cafés are common, even in smaller rural villages, and charges are reasonable. Many hotels and hostels now offer Wi-Fi as do many cafés and restaurants.

## Climate

The weather and climate in Peru vary greatly depending on the region. Along the Pacific coast, including Lima, the climate is temperate. The average temperature is around 24°C (75°F). The temperature can reach 30°C (86°F) but generally no lower than 15°C (59°F) in the summer.

In the high Andean climates of the areas around Cusco and Lake Titicaca, the climate is colder with wet summers and dry winters. The average temperature is around 12°C (53.6°F) and although it can get quite warm during the day, the temperature at night drops regularly to below freezing.

## Clothing to Pack

For Lima and the coastal areas bring summer clothes for the warmer months and a thin sweater or coat for the cooler evenings. For the Amazon region (Puerto Maldonado/Iquitos), long-sleeved light clothing (preferably cotton), raincoats, hat and sunglasses as well as sun protection, are appropriate for the whole year.

During the stay in the highlands (Cusco/Puno/Andes), you should bring warm clothes including a fleece jacket, hat and sunglasses as well as sun protection.

## South America Pre-Departure Guide

### Cuisine

Peruvian cuisine is incredibly diverse with regions and some cities having their own specialities based on the geography and climate that determine the available ingredients. Today, Peruvian cuisine combines pre-Inca and Inca staple ingredients and food with the cuisines that the immigrants from Europe, Africa and Asia brought with them. This has resulted in a unique fusion of foods and flavours.

The four traditional staples of Peruvian cuisine are corn, potatoes and other tubers, amaranthaceae (quinoa, kañiwa and kiwicha) and legumes (beans and lupins). The Spanish introduced rice, wheat, beef, pork and chicken.

Over recent years, some traditional foods, such as quinoa, kiwicha and chilli peppers, have increased in popularity leading to a revival of interest in native Peruvian foods and culinary techniques. Gastronomists around the world now rate Peruvian cuisine as the best cuisine in South America.

The Peruvian diet is mainly based on chicken, beef and seafood and can sometimes be quite spicy. Regional dishes vary, and aji (chilli) is often used.

Typical dishes include:

**Lomo Saltado (Saltadito)** – stir fried sliced beef, tomatoes, onion, garlic and cumin, French fries and accompanied by rice

**Aji de Gallina** – chicken strips in a yellow chilli sauce served with rice

**Empanadas** – pastry cases filled with chicken, beef or cheese

**Pollo a la Brasa** – roasted marinated chicken

**Ceviche** – raw fish marinated in lime juice with chilli and onion

**Cuy** – guinea pig, a highland dish – usually roasted or barbecued

**Papa a la huancaína (Huancayo-style potatoes)** – sliced boiled potatoes served on a bed of lettuce with a slightly spicy cheese sauce with olives

**Note:** Avoid drinking tap water at all times. Bottled water is readily available to purchase. Ask not to have ice in drinks purchased from street vendors or in markets. Ice served in drinks in restaurants and cafes is safe to drink.

For alcoholic beverages, the traditional spirit of Peru is pisco, a grape brandy. The famous pisco sour cocktail is made from pisco, egg white, bitters and lime juice. Some regional beers are also worth trying, including Cusqueña and Pilsen Callao.

### Language

Spanish is the official language of Peru but there are many indigenous languages as well, including Quechua and Aymara. The Spanish spoken in Peru has some regional variations in pronunciation, accent and some expressions. The variations correspond with the geographical regions of coast, rainforest and mountains.

### National Holidays

New Year's Day, Holy Week, Labour Day, St Peter and St Paul, Independence Day, Santa Rosa de Lima, Battle of Angamos, All Saints' Day, Immaculate Conception Day, Christmas Day.



# South America Pre-Departure Guide



## Uruguay - General Information

**Population:** approximately 3.5 million

**Capital:** Montevideo

Uruguay offers cosmopolitan city life, surf beaches, historical colonial towns, traditional estancias (ranches), national parks, wetlands and hot springs. The UNESCO town of Colonia del Sacramento – one of the oldest cities in the country – is a highlight of Uruguay and full of colonial charm. The capital, Montevideo, is historic yet modern and vibrant.

## Interesting Facts

- Montevideo is the southernmost capital city in the Americas.
- Cows outnumber people 3 to 1 in Uruguay.
- The first FIFA World Cup took place in Uruguay in 1930.

## Time Zone

Uruguay is in Greenwich Meantime GMT-3

## Money

The unit of currency in Uruguay is the Uruguayan peso (UYU).

Foreign currencies can be exchanged at banks or at currency exchange services (casas de cambio) that are widespread in Montevideo, Colonia and coastal tourist resorts. Some hotels will also provide money exchange services but the rates are substantially lower than those offered by banks and currency exchange services.

ATMs (cajero automático) are plentiful in cities and some smaller towns and accept foreign-issued cards such as Visa, Mastercard and Maestro. Debit cards can be used to withdraw cash and credit cards to obtain cash advances.

Credit cards are widely accepted in major cities and tourist destinations including Montevideo, Punta del Este and Colonia del Sacramento. The most commonly accepted credit cards are Visa and Mastercard.

Please check websites such as [www.oanda.com](http://www.oanda.com) or [www.xe.com](http://www.xe.com) for up-to-date exchange rates prior to your departure.

## Business Hours

Normal business hours are Monday to Friday from 9.00 am to 6.00 pm. Banks are open Monday to Friday from 1.00 pm to 5.00 pm. Stores are also generally open on Saturdays from 9.00 am. to 1.00 pm. Shopping centres are open daily from 10.00 am to 10.00 pm.

## Electricity

Electricity in Uruguay is 230 volts

## Long-Distance Dialling, Emergency Numbers, Internet

Country code: + 598

Ambulance: 105

Police: 911

Wi-fi zones and internet cafés are common in cities and larger towns and Wi-Fi is becoming increasingly available in many hotels.



# South America Pre-Departure Guide

## Climate

Montevideo and Colonia have pleasant year-round temperate climates with no wet season as the annual rainfall total is spread across the year. The climate in coastal areas such as Punta del Este, is relatively mild with summer temperatures ranging from 25–32°C (77–89.6°F), and winter temperatures never fall below zero.

Along the Rio Uruguay, the summer climate is generally hot and humid with temperatures as high as 36°C (96.8°F). The interior hill country tends to be slightly cooler with average temperatures of 17°C (62.6°F) and summer temperatures averaging a maximum of 21–26°C (69.8–78.8°F).

## Language

Spanish is the main language spoken in Uruguay with Portunol or Brasilerol, a mixture of Portuguese and Spanish, being spoken on the Brazil border. Uruguayan Spanish differs slightly to the Spanish spoken in other South American countries due to the high numbers of Italian immigrants.

## Cuisine

The cuisine of Uruguay has mainly Spanish but also Italian influences. Beef is fundamental to many dishes with asado, a type of barbecued beef, being the national dish. The chivito – a thick steak sandwich with ham, bacon, hard-boiled egg, cheese and tomatoes or olives – is the most popular food item. The national drink is mate, a herbal tea.

Other typical dishes include: choripán (grilled chorizo inside a small baguette-style bread), empanada, milanesa rellena (beef or chicken filled with cheese and ham, crumbed and fried), pancho (Uruguayan hotdog), and pastel de carne (ground beef, green peppers and eggs covered in mashed potato).

## National Holidays

New Year, Carnival, Holy Week, Landing of the 33 Patriots Day, Labour Day, Constitution Day, Independence Day, Columbus Day, All Saint's Day, Christmas Day



# South America Pre-Departure Guide



## Venezuela - General Information

**Population:** approximately 32 million

**Capital:** Caracas

Venezuela is a country of immense variety. It offers a vast stretch of Caribbean coastline, Andean peaks, wetlands teeming with wildlife, the Amazon, table-top mountains known as tepuis, and the world's highest waterfall – the Angel Falls, set in the beautiful Canaima National Park. The Gran Sabana also offers beautiful waterfalls and tepuis, the most famous of which is Mount Roraima.

The Orinoco Delta with its wetlands and waterways is an ideal place for wildlife watching as is Los Llanos, a vast seasonally flooded savannah that rivals the Pantanal of Brazil for biodiversity. For a Caribbean experience there is Los Roques National Park, a chain of islands and coral reefs.

## Interesting Facts

- Venezuela is home to the world's highest waterfall, the Angel Falls.
- Venezuela is the fifth largest exporter of oil in the world.
- Venezuela is home to the second longest river in South America, the Orinoco.

## Identification

Always carry a copy of your passport and Venezuela entry stamp with you, wherever you go.

## Time Zone

Venezuela is in Greenwich Meantime GMT-4

## Money

The unit of currency in Venezuela is the bolivar (VEF).

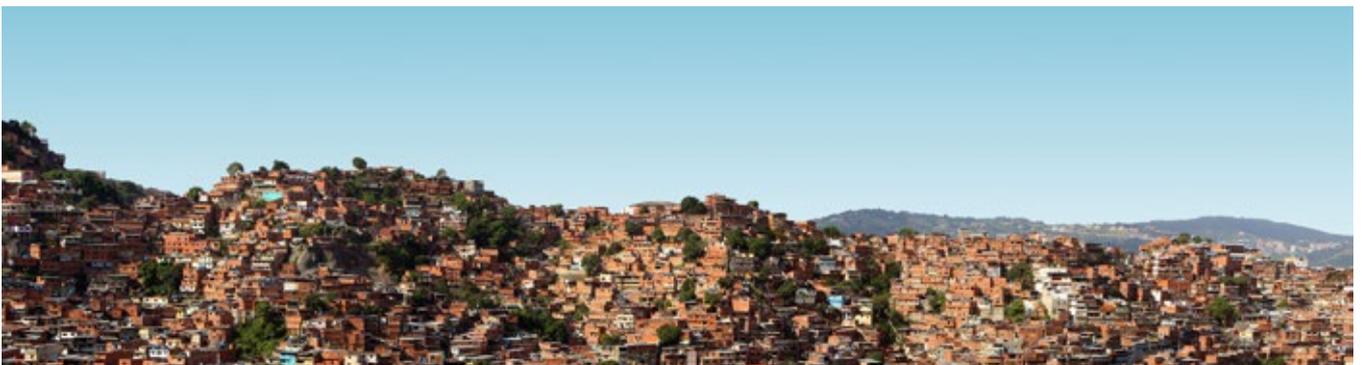
There are now strict currency controls in place in Venezuela. Currency exchange services will exchange US dollars and US dollar traveller's cheques for bolivars. Please ensure that you only use official currency exchange service providers. Do not use the black market as you are at risk of being given counterfeit local currency. You cannot exchange bolivars to any other currency outside of Venezuela, so ensure you get rid of your bolivars prior to leaving Venezuela.

Credit cards are accepted in all major cities and most towns. ATMs are also plentiful in cities and large towns but please take care when using debit or credit cards as Venezuela has a serious problem with credit card fraud and card cloning.

We recommend that you travel with a supply of US dollars, as well as small amounts of local currency as the US dollar is readily accepted in major hotels and tourist areas. Use local currency for small purchases.

Be careful when withdrawing money from ATMs as muggings do occur. Where possible use the machines located within banks. Only withdraw money during the day and if possible, be accompanied by someone you know. Be aware of any suspicious-looking people nearby and check the ATM for possible criminal interference that might indicate card cloning.

Please check websites such as [www.oanda.com](http://www.oanda.com) or [www.xe.com](http://www.xe.com) for up-to-date exchange rates prior to your departure.



# South America Pre-Departure Guide

## Business Hours

Normal business hours are Monday to Friday from 8.00 am to 12.30 pm and from about 2.00 pm to 5.15 pm. Banks are open Monday to Friday from 8.30 am to 3.30 pm. Shops are open Monday to Saturday usually from 9.30 am to 7.00 pm but hours can sometimes be 11.00 am to 10.00 pm.

## Electricity Voltage

Electrical outlets deliver 120v alternating current. It is recommended that you bring a multi-adaptor and converter.

## Long-Distance Dialling, Emergency Numbers, Internet

Country code: + 58

Medical: 171

Police: 171

Internet cafés are widespread throughout Venezuela and are located in most towns and all cities. Wi-fi is becoming increasingly common in many hotels – certainly larger hotels and posadas (hostels).

## Climate

Venezuela is an equatorial country, so there are no real seasons other than wet and dry. The dry season runs from November to April and the wet from May to October. The Caribbean coast is generally dry all of the year and the capital, Caracas has an 'everlasting spring' climate.

## Cuisine

Venezuela's cuisine varies greatly from one region to another but is mostly tropical and Andean with European influences. Staple foods include corn, rice, plantain, yams, beans and several meats. Seafood is popular along the coast.

Typical dishes include:

**pabellon criollo** - the national dish consisting of shredded beef and black beans served on a bed of white rice, accompanied by a fried egg or fried plantain slices

**arepa** - the most famous Venezuelan dish, an arepa is a corn meal cake that is grilled, baked or fried, split and filled with cheese and meats

**cachapa** - a thick pancake made from a puree of corn, sugar, salt and oil, folded over and filled with soft white cheese

**cachitos de jamon** – similar to a croissant and filled with chopped ham and/or cheese

We recommend that you drink bottled water and avoid tap water at all times even when brushing your teeth.

## Language

Spanish is the first language of Venezuela but there are also numerous indigenous dialects including Wayuu, Warao and Pemón.



For more information call 1800 637 688 (Freecall),  
visit [auroraexpeditions.com.au](http://auroraexpeditions.com.au)  
or email [info@auroraexpeditions.com.au](mailto:info@auroraexpeditions.com.au)

