

Chile Eclipse – Patagonia & Across the Andes

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1/2	Depart London / Arrive Santiago
Day 3	Puerto Natales
Day 4/6	Torres del Paine, Punta Arenas, Puerto Montt/Valdivia
Day 7/8	Pucon + Eclipse
Day 9/10	Puerto Varas and Chiloe Island
Day 11/12	Andean Crossing to Bariloche
Day 13/14	Buenos Aires
Day 15/16	Fly home



Images from top: Torres del Paine, Villarrica, Solar Eclipse

Departs

December 2020

Focus

Total solar eclipse, landscapes and nature

Grading

A. Day walks – all optional

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code CHL09)

Highlights:

- Witness a total solar eclipse in stunning surroundings
- Andean crossing and the dramatic tower mountains of Patagonia's Torres del Paine National Park
- Deep blue lakes, snow-capped volcanoes, pristine forests and rushing waterfalls of Chile's Lake District
- Humboldt and Magellanic Penguins on Chiloé, the island of myths and legends
- Tour multiple cities including the vibrant Santiago and Buenos Aires



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Introduction

Chile stretches from the tropics almost all the way to Antarctica and is home to an extremely wide variety of landscapes and ecosystems. This tour focuses on two regions of Southern Chile that are famed for their beauty and represent a significant part of Chilean identity. The Lake District is considered by Chileans to represent everything pure, healthy and unspoilt in Chile. Perfectly conical, snow-capped volcanoes form the backdrop to the azure-blue lakes. It is a land of pristine forests cut through by rushing rivers and waterfalls.



The green rolling landscape of Chiloé is a barrier between the Pacific Ocean and the calmer protected Interior Sea where all the settlements are located. The people of Chiloé are renowned for their song, dance and crafts. Much of Chile's folk music is influenced by the gentle summer fogs and harsh winters of Chiloé.

Monday 14th December 2020 is an important date for those fortunate enough to be in the right spot on the Earth. On that day, the shadow of the Moon will race across the Pacific Ocean, reaching the Chilean coast in the middle of the day. Those watching from Chile's Lake District will witness a total solar eclipse as the Sun is high in the sky. These rare events are considered by many to be the most spectacular sight in the whole of the natural world.

The build-up begins about an hour-and-a-quarter before totality with the moon appearing to take a first small 'bite' out of the disk of the Sun. Then, as the minutes pass, the moon's presence becomes more noticeable and after an hour the Sun appears as a slender crescent. Minutes before totality the shadows sharpen and the colours of the surrounding landscape become richer as light levels drop quickly. Brighter stars and planets become visible in the darkened sky and in the last few moments before totality the Sun's rays stream out almost from a single point, creating the remarkable 'diamond ring' effect.

As the Sun finally disappears behind the Moon, totality begins and suddenly everything changes. For a couple of minutes protective glasses can be removed and the eclipse viewed directly in all its glory. The black disk of the Moon is surrounded by pearly streamers that reveal the extended outer atmosphere of the Sun. Closer in, pink solar flares can often be seen erupting from the Sun. Transfixed by the ethereal vision, time seems to stand still. Nothing that you have read can prepare you for totality. No photographs capture the exquisite beauty. This is a time to savour every moment.

All too soon the Sun emerges again with a second diamond ring and totality is over. The period of totality is brief but the memory of those minutes spent in the Moon's shadow will remain with you. Such is the wonder and delight of an eclipse that many people find themselves keen to repeat the experience and start planning for the next eclipse.

Itinerary

Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Days 1 – 2

Santiago

We depart London Heathrow on direct flights with British Airways for an overnight flight to Santiago, the capital of Chile. After arriving at Santiago's international airport the next morning, we will transfer to a comfortable hotel for the first night.

Santiago is a cosmopolitan mix of museums, restaurants, colonial architecture nestled amongst modern buildings, contrasting neighbourhoods and a fantastic central market that is a food lovers heaven. The stunning backdrop of the Andes combined with the cultural and historical heart of the city makes Santiago a great introduction to Chile.

In the afternoon we will take a tour of this vibrant city visiting the stately Presidential Palace, the Plaza de Armas in the historic centre and the beautiful old Post Office, and, time dependent, continuing on to the fashionable business districts, stopping on the way to admire the towering statue of the Virgin Mary overlooking the city.

Includes meals on flight plus breakfast and dinner on day 2.

Day 3

Punta Arenas / Puerto Natales

Our first full day in this beautiful country involves a short flight from Santiago to Punta Arenas in the late morning, followed by a scenic three-hour drive to Puerto Natales. Time will pass quickly as striking mountain views keep us occupied as we approach the former fishing port.

About an hour into the journey we will make a stop at Estancia Olga Teresa – one of the most accessible sites to see the Andean Condor. Nesting on the cliffs in numbers up to 100 individuals we can hope for excellent views of these birds and great photographic opportunities as they glide along the cliff face. We will enjoy dinner at the Estancia before driving on to our hotel in Puerto Natales.

Includes breakfast and dinner.

Day 4

Torres del Paine

Continuing our journey north, we make our way through one of the most spectacular mountainous regions on the planet: the Torres del Paine. These soaring towers of granite form the centre piece of a wild and beautiful national park with glaciers, fast flowing rivers, waterfalls and the freshest air.

Upon arrival we will take a morning walk, allowing exploration of the Lago Sarmiento Park and Laguna Amarga. Amongst the wide-ranging birds in the park, we can hope to encounter many raptors such as the Black-chested Buzzard Eagle, Aplomando Falcon and Southern Caracara. On the ground we should see the flightless Lesser Rhea.

In terms of mammals, we should see Guanaco (the wild form of domesticated Llama) and there is a good chance of Large Hairy Armadillo and South Andean Deer. The sight of the Andes' top predator the Puma is also possible. Additionally, as we traverse the landscape, fascinating paintings decorate the rocks, created by the region's indigenous population in ages past.

Our accommodation for the night is Hotel Lago Grey, set in a beautiful forested area on the shores of Lake Grey, at the heart of the Torres del Paine National Park. The on-site restaurant and bar provide wonderful views of the lake through large panoramic windows.

Includes breakfast, boxed lunch and dinner.

Day 5

Punta Arenas

It's an early start today to visit the nearby 'Grey glacier' by boat (Grey III). Grey Glacier's immense blue-grey ice sheet envelopes an island in the centre of the lake and sprawls into Lago Grey, which has icebergs drifting across the water. Snow-capped mountains and crystal-clear waterfalls add to the picturesque landscape. An hour's sailing through stunning scenery brings us to the terminal face of the glacier to see in close up the varying colours and shapes of the ice and hear the sounds emanating from within.

We shall return to the hotel for lunch before setting off back to Punta Arenas, Chile's most southerly city, lying on the Straits of Magellan.

Punta Arenas' advantageous location gave it tremendous economic success and it continues to be used by merchant ships. It is home to a full-scale reconstruction of Ferdinand Magellan's "Nao Victoria" – a ship that was part of Magellan's 16th Century expedition and discovered the route around South America to the Pacific. Of the fleet, it was the only ship that successfully completed the circumnavigation. In recollection of its fabulous seafaring legacy, a welcoming statue honouring Magellan, (surrounded by the magnificent 19th century homes of the great estate owners), pays tribute in the main square, "Plaza de Armas".

Time permitting, we will head to the waterfront to see what birdlife is around. The disused remains of the pier have been taken over by birds, surrounded by the dramatic landscape of the Magellan Straights and snow-capped mountains. Usually seen in this area are Magellanic Cormorant, Dolphin Gull, Magellanic Oystercatcher and Black-browed Albatross, as well as Flying and Flightless Steamer Ducks.

Includes breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 6

Travel to Valdivia

We fly from Punta Arenas to Puerto Montt and drive to the city of Valdivia, our base for the eclipse. Valdivia has a great art scene and is known for its craft beers and German influence. A university city, it's full of restaurants, coffee shops and bars, offering a great range.

Our hotel for three nights is situated in a peaceful district along the banks of the Calle-Calle, one of the broad rivers that intersect the city. The centre of the city and the colourful fish market are a pleasant ten-minute walk along the river bank where you are likely to encounter some of the South American Sea Lions that inhabit the stretch of river by the fish market in the hope of catching some of the discarded fish.



Back in 1960, the city suffered the most powerful earthquake ever recorded, registering a magnitude of 9.5. The giant tsunami that was triggered left a trail of destruction as far as Japan. The waves set off by the earthquake continued across the Pacific for a week and aftershocks continued for a month after the first tremor. As a result of the severity of the earthquake, most of the buildings are more modern and low-rise, one of the few original buildings is Casa Anwandter, a German colonial house that is now a museum.

Includes breakfast and dinner.

Day 7

Pucon/Araucaria Forest

Today we will explore deeper into this beautiful region of lakes and volcanoes. Driving north-east from Valdivia we cross rich arable lands towards the town of Villarrica at the western end of a lake of the same name. As we approach, we are met with views of the near perfect cone of one of the region's more active volcanoes: Volcan Villarrica. The volcano's last eruption occurred in 2015 and steam continues to issue from vents near the summit.

Heading further into the mountains we encounter temperate forests of the Southern beeches (Genus: *Nothofagus*) and the magical stands of Monkey Puzzle trees (*Araucaria araucana*). The Monkey Puzzle is a species much admired in the gardens of stately homes in England but is native to a small region of Chile and Argentina. The sight of these fine trees set against snow-capped volcanoes is outstanding. If we are lucky, we will see Black Woodpecker and Slender-billed Parakeet.

As this is the evening before eclipse day there will be a presentation to inform everyone about the eclipse site and describe in detail the celestial event that will unfold the following day. Includes breakfast, buffet lunch and dinner.

Day 8

Eclipse Day

The day starts with a journey north along the rugged Pacific coast, passing colourful fishing villages and into the path the eclipse will take. Our plan is to view the eclipse from the shores of Lago Budi, a shallow brackish lake. The prospect of clear skies is higher in this part of the eclipse track than anywhere else in Chile. The reduced presence of cloud in this area is a result of the suppression of cloud formation by cooling air flowing in from the Pacific. This effect can be seen up to 30 km inland.

With a population of more than one million the Mapuche people constitute the largest ethnic group within Chile living mainly in the region between the river Bío Bío south to Chiloé Island. In the Lago Budi region over 70% declare themselves to be Mapuche and it is amongst this community that we will spend the day and set up for the eclipse of the sun. To facilitate comfortable observation we will have shade, chairs and toilets, along with some local snacks to keep us going and of course, the company of our guides.

The Mapuche culture and language came under great pressure during the Pinochet era when many people were evicted from their land but in recent times more enlightened policies have supported their culture and the establishment of the Indigenous Act has protected their lands. Our time with the Mapuche will include an insightful talk about their view of the cosmos and a boat trip on the lake which should offer good numbers of wading birds and breeding Black-necked Swans.

The eclipse will occur in the middle of the day with the Sun (and Moon) high in the sky at an altitude of 71.5° at totality. The following times are approximate as they depend upon the exact position of our viewing site.

	Universal Time (UT)	Local time (CLT)
Start of Partial Eclipse (C1)	14:39	11:39
Start of total eclipse (C2)	16:00:44	13:00:44
End of total eclipse (C3)	16:02:52	13:02:52
End of Partial Phase (C4)	17:29	14:29

The duration of totality will be around 2 minutes 8 seconds.

We must keep our travel plans flexible on eclipse day. With an eye on the latest forecasts we must be prepared to alter our plans if the circumstances look more favourable in one place than another.

We will enjoy lunch with the Mapuche and time permitting we will see the traditional Mapuche game of Palin which is similar to hockey and explore the area around the community, heading out by traditional boat to Cuevo del Zorro Island

The return drive to Valdivia will be in the late afternoon.

Includes breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 9

Frutillar

En route to Puerto Varas we will introduce you to the small town of Frutillar, set on the shores of Lake Llanquihue. Frutillar, with its loving restored 19th-Century German immigrant houses, brightly-coloured flower gardens and open-air museum featuring a water mill and functional open-air smithy, will transport you back to another time – a feeling augmented by the abundance of delicious German 'kuchen' cakes, which can be procured and savoured throughout the town. Known for its classical events, black sand beach and great food choices at Philippi Street, Frutillar is a lovely town to explore.

Includes breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 10

Chiloé

This day trip begins early in the morning, setting off south from Puerto Varas, towards Parga, where the car ferry crosses to Chiloé – an island full of myths, legends and a rich local culture. The first stop on the island is the Bay of Caulín, where black-necked swans and other bird species can be observed during summer. Next is Ancud, the northern-most town and former capital of the island, where you get a brief insight into the lifestyle of the island's inhabitants, known as 'Chilotes' in Chile. We will also see the colourful shingle houses on stilts, typical for the island, as well as fishing boats, the harbour and the market. Whilst in Ancud we also visit the fortifications dating back to the era of the War of Independence.

Our journey will continue along the northern coast of Chiloé, before reaching the Puñihuil penguin colony. Puñihuil houses the "Pingüíneras" – a rocky landscape consisting of three volcanic islands, all protected by the Chilean Forest Service (CONAF) and declared a natural monument. It is considered

one of the greatest natural treasures of the region as Humboldt and Magellanic Penguins nest alongside one another from October to March each year – a rare occurrence! A variety of other animals, such as Kelp Gulls, Red-legged Cormorants and Marine Otters, can also be observed here. We will get an introduction to the history of the "Pingüínera" and then, weather permitting, will take a boat trip to explore the islands and experience their wildlife.

Includes breakfast and lunch.



Magellanic Penguin

Day 11

Chile's Lake District, Bariloche

Today we have a spectacular crossing from Chile to Argentina, via the Chilean Lake District and over the Andes. Sail across 3 beautiful coloured lakes (from emerald green to sapphire blue), see waterfalls diving over lava rocks and forests of indigenous trees, with volcanoes and the Andes forming impressive backdrops. A day of breathtaking scenery!

We will explore Chile's Lake District and the wonderful region surrounding Puerto Varas. Magnificent views towards the Osorno and Calbuco volcanoes will be enjoyed during the drive along Lake Llanquihue. The first stop of the day is by the wild 'Saltos de Petrohue', a collection of rapids and waterfalls that dance over the impressive formations of lava rocks from the surrounding volcanoes. It is the waters of the Petrohue River itself that have eroded and shaped these rocks over thousands of years.

A catamaran will continue our sightseeing as we set off across Lake Todos Los Santos from the quay at Petrohue. 'All Saints Lake' is surrounded by densely forested mountains, while the perfect cone of the Osorno volcano dominates the landscape. During the journey the boat passes small islands, waterfalls and the pointed summit of the Puntagudo volcano. Your destination is Peulla, in the heart of the Vicente Pérez Rosales National Park. A hike through the dense Valdivian temperate rainforest will take you to the 'Cascada de la Novia' waterfall, and will introduce many indigenous trees and plants alongside the interesting educational path.



Osorno Volcano

In the afternoon, the journey continues to Argentina, via the Pérez Rosales Pass. Short distances by bus are interspersed by lake crossings by boat or catamaran. Fortunately this route has never been turned into a major highway and therefore remains much the same as that traversed by the earliest settlers to the region, over a century ago, with wonderful views of uninterrupted pristine landscape throughout. The last boat journey ends at Puerto Pañuelo on Lake Nahuel Huapi, where a short bus ride will take us to Bariloche for our two-night stay.

Includes breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 12

Bariloche

We take you to one of the most beautiful places near San Carlos de Bariloche, perfect for gorgeous landscape photos. Following the Limay River north along the "Pampa Newbery", we will reach a natural amphitheatre with stunning panoramic views. We continue through to the "Enchanted

Valley”, home to many strange rock formations bound to inspire your imagination. At the confluence of the Traful and Limay rivers we will continue through steppes and valleys towards Villa Traful. There will be many photo stops including the Traful viewpoint, the beautiful Lago Espejo (Mirror Lake), and a landscape of dense forests. Finally, the tour returns to Bariloche along the Nahuel Huapi Lake.

Includes breakfast and lunch.

Day 13

Buenos Aires

With a late morning flight to Buenos Aires we will leave the hotel after breakfast. After checking into the hotel in Buenos Aires, we will take you on a tour to discover the highlights of the attractive and vivacious capital of Argentina.

The city is known as the Paris of South America and its buildings tell the story of a glorious past, especially in the city centre and around the Avenida de Mayo boulevard. We will visit the Plaza de Mayo, where the Government building Casa Rosada, the Cathedral and the City Hall are located. In addition, this place is famous for the "Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo", who still walk around the square in silence every Thursday afternoon in memory of their disappeared husbands and sons after the last military dictatorship. The journey takes you through the 'tango neighbourhood', San Telmo to La Boca, which is famous for its colourful tin houses. This district is home to the oldest port of Buenos Aires, where many Italian immigrants once arrived. Even today, this picturesque district is mainly inhabited by people with Italian roots.

At the end of the tour you will visit the northern region of Buenos Aires. Parks and wide avenues dominate the cityscape, giving it a very different atmosphere to that experienced in the morning.

Time permitting, if you wish to explore more, head to the botanical gardens to see the butterfly house and herbal garden, visit Recoleta Cemetery and see Eva Perón's tomb and adjacent cemetery the Basilica de Nuestra Señora del Pilar (opened in 1732), a combination of a simple colonial exterior with baroque altars and pulpit inside. Try the local cuisine – empanadas, humitas, locro, dulce de leche and, as you are in Argentina, eat steak and drink Malbec!

Includes breakfast and dinner.

Day 14

Buenos Aires

The day today is free for you to explore on your own, head to a coffee shop and watch the world go by or join us on a local wildlife excursion.

For those wishing to spend the time looking for the local wildlife, a short walk will bring us to the Reserva Ecológica de Buenos Aires, also known as Costanera Sur Ecological Reserve, an 865-acre tract of low land on the Río de la Plata riverbank located on the east side of the district of Puerto.

The wetland contains a great range of bird species from Coscoroba Swan and Giant Wood-Rail to colourful passerines such as the Red-crested Cardinal. Our guide will lead a slow walk around this rich reserve where you may also see mammals such as the Brazilian Guinea Pig and Plains Viscacha as well as many lizards, turtles, butterflies and flowers.

This evening we experience the tango. A heady blend of Spanish and African traditions, the tango developed in the brothels and communal backstreets of Buenos Aires' poorer port districts in the 1880s. As an art form, the tango reached a climax in the first decades of the 20th century when the language of the streets formed the poetic lyrics of tango. This blend of tragedy and passion was fused in the love songs of famed tango singer Carlos Gardel. Today, the tango has UNESCO World Heritage status, part of the world's 'intangible cultural heritage.' It would therefore be remiss of us if we were to let this wonderful trip come to a close without enjoying dinner and a tango show in Buenos Aires, where we will get a true feel for the Argentine cultural personality; its passion, sensuality, and reverence for history.

Includes breakfast and dinner.

Days 15 and 16

In Flight

We begin our journey home, flying direct from Buenos Aires Airport.

Includes breakfast on day 15 and meals on the flight.

Extensions:

Why not extend your time in South America – we have a range of extensions which can be added to your Eclipse tour and it is possible to change the number of days or combine extensions and add them pre or post tour.

Easter Island:

Head over to Easter Island for a 4 night stay, seeing the incredible moai that dominate the island. Whilst there are no native mammals, there are Maori Rats 'Rattus exulans', as well as geckos and lizards that were brought over by early settlers. Native birds include Frigatebird, Masked Booby and Red-tailed Tropicbird plus introduced Chimango Caracara and Common Diuca-finch, which you should see on your excursions over the island. 4 Night stay including flights, 3 full days guided excursions, 3 star traditional hotel on a bed and breakfast basis from £1,859.00 per person, based on 2 people travelling and sharing a room.

Iguazu Falls:

Explore the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Iguazu Falls, an impressive 2.7km wide. With a guided tour of both the Argentinian and Brazilian sides of the Falls you will get to see panoramic views as well as getting up close to the thundering waterfalls. An added bonus is the wildlife - around 400 species of birds and 80 species of mammals that inhabit the national parks that surround the falls. 2 Night stay including flights, 2 guided excursions, 4 star hotel on a bed and breakfast basis from £1,095.00 per person, based on 2 people travelling and sharing a room

Peninsula Valdez:

Based in Puerto Madryn in the north of Patagonia, this 2 night extension is a wildlife delight! South America's largest penguin colony is here (half a million Magellanic Penguins) plus also South American Sea lion, Southern Elephant Seal, Orcas, Southern Right Whales, Guanaco, South American Grey Fox, Large Hairy Armadillos and Patagonian Hog-nosed Skunk. Birdlife is prolific here and amongst the many species are Tawny-throated Dotterel, Patagonian Canastero, Burrowing Parrot, Chilean Flamingo and Chimango Caracara. 2 Night stay including flights, 2 guided excursions, 4 star hotel on a bed and breakfast basis from £1,395.00 per person, based on 2 people travelling and sharing a room

Holiday Inclusions / Extra Expenses

The following are included in the price of the holiday:

- International and domestic flights in economy class
- Accommodation throughout
- Meals: 12 breakfasts, 9 lunches and 11 dinners
- All transport and guiding
- Park fees and reserve entry fees

The following are not included and should be budgeted for:

- Drinks
- Discretionary tipping
- Any other personal spending e.g. souvenirs

Tour Grading

We have graded this tour A - easy day walks. There is no major trekking on tour, but there will be plenty of daytime walks in a variety of habitat types and in some of the major forest reserves of Chile. All walks are optional and taken at a leisurely pace, but they will often be over hilly, rocky or forested terrain.

Accommodation

All of the hotels are of a good international standard. All the rooms have private facilities. Most of the hotels have swimming pools.

Your Safety & Security

Risks to your safety and security are an unavoidable aspect of all travel and the best current advice on such risks is provided for you by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. In order to assess and protect against any risks in your chosen destination, it is essential that you refer to the Foreign Office website (<https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/chile>) regularly prior to travel.

Tour Extensions

There are many ways in which you could extend your trip to Chile and Argentina we would be delighted to make arrangements for you. Possibilities range from the immense falls at Iguassu to the beaches of Rio de Janeiro or the dramatic nature of the Valdez Peninsula.

Contact us if you would like discuss the options.

How to Book Your Place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card to hand, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website.