

# Patagonia



A star-riddled sky and snarled grasses dwarf the rider on the steppe as his horse closes the gap on the horizon. In South America's southern frontier, nature, long left to its own devices, grows wild, barren and beautiful. Spaces are large, as are the silences that fill them. For those who come here, an encounter with such emptiness can be as awesome as the sight of jagged peaks, pristine rivers and dusty backwater oases.

The paving of Ruta Nacional 40 (RN 40) is well under way, but it remains among the world's loneliest stretches, a spellbinding road to nowhere that has stirred affection in personalities as disparate as Butch Cassidy and Bruce Chatwin. On the eastern seaboard, RN 3 shoots south, connecting oil boomtowns with the remains of ancient petrified forests, Welsh settlements and the spectacular Península Valdés. The map will tell you that Patagonia is a very large place, but motoring its distant horizons offers a whole other level of insight.

Then there is the other, trendy Patagonia: the tourist hubs studded with Ray-Ban shops and reggae bars, where you will meet a dozen other travelers before one local. El Calafate and El Chaltén boast spectacular sights, but they remain a world apart from the mythical RN 40.

This chapter covers the region from its political start at the mouth of Río Negro, continuing through Chubut and Santa Cruz provinces south to the Strait of Magellan. Chile's Punta Arenas, Puerto Natales and Parque Nacional Torres del Paine are also included.

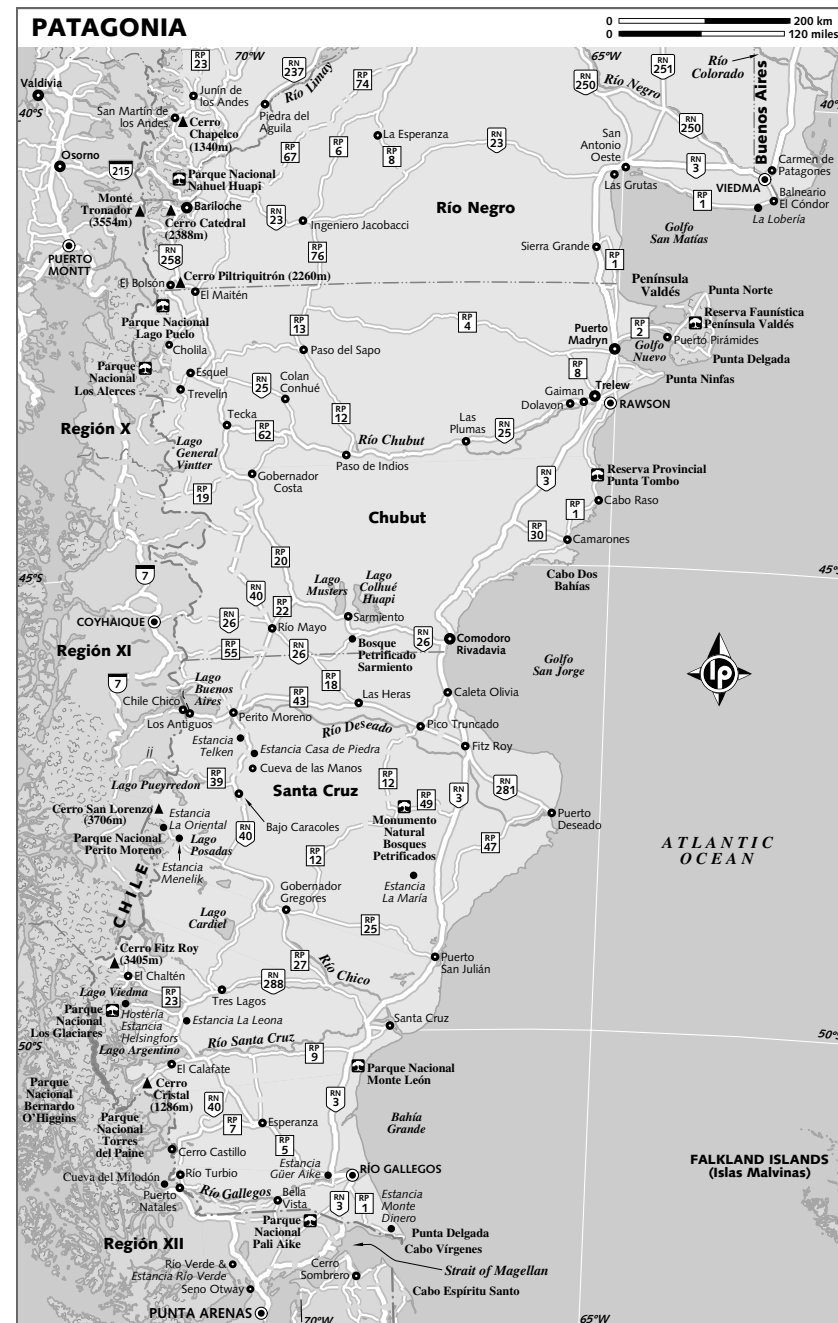
## HIGHLIGHTS

- Gaze upon the blue-hued **Glaciar Perito Moreno** (p495) as icebergs crumble in thunderous booms
- Explore millennial forest in the eternal green of **Parque Nacional Los Alerces** (p473)
- Trek the toothy **Fitz Roy Range** (p483) near El Chaltén in the northern sector of Parque Nacional Los Glaciares
- See southern right whales up close in the waters of **Reserva Faunística Península Valdés** (p436)
- Ride the wide-open range and feast on fire-pit-roasted lamb at an **estancia** (p479)



■ POPULATION: 838,620

■ AREA: 475,000 SQ KM



## Climate

Argentine Patagonia sits in the Chilean Andes' rain shadow, which blocks most Pacific storms. After heavy precipitation falls on the seaward Andean slopes, powerful dry westerlies gust incessantly across the arid Patagonian plains. Due to oceanic influence where the South American continent tapers toward the south, the region's climate is generally temperate, but winter temperatures often drop well below freezing.

## National Parks & Reserves

Patagonia's national parks boast diverse landscapes, immense solitude and incredible wildlife. There are the coastal treasures of Monte León (p460), the ancient forests of Los Alerces (p473), the raw beauty of little-known Perito Moreno (p481), and the dazzling glaciers and peaks of Los Glaciares (p483). Outstanding Chilean parks included here are the Torres del Paine (p512), the remote Bernardo O'Higgins (p512) and the Paleolithic Pali Aike (p507). Among Patagonia's world-class natural reserves, Península Valdés (p436) ranks at the top. Don't leave the region without setting foot in at least a couple of these natural wonders.

## Getting There & Around

Patagonia is synonymous with unmaintained gravel roads, missing transport links and interminable bottom-scalding bus rides. Fortunately, an ever-expanding network of charter and scheduled flights is emerging to connect all the highlights, at least in summer. Before skimping on your transportation budget, bear in mind that the region comprises a third of the world's eighth-largest country. If you're bussing it along the eastern seaboard, note that schedules are based on the demands of Buenos Aires, with arrivals and departures frequently occurring in the dead of night. For information on transport with tour operators along RN 40, see p470.

## COASTAL PATAGONIA (ALONG RN 3)

Patagonia's cavorting right whales, penguin colonies and traditional Welsh settlements are all accessed by Argentina's coastal RN 3. While this paved road takes in some fascinating maritime history, it also travels long

yawning stretches of landscape that blur the horizon like a never-ending blank slate.

Wildlife enthusiasts shouldn't miss the world-renowned Península Valdés, the continent's largest Magellanic penguin colonies at Reserva Provincial Punta Tombo and Río Deseado's diverse seabird population. The quiet villages of Puerto San Julián and Camarones make for quiet seaside retreats, while Gaiman tells the story of Welsh settlement through a lazy afternoon of tea and cakes.

A booming petroleum industry means that lodging may be hard to find in the oil towns of Comodoro Rivadavia and Caleta Olivia.

## CARMEN DE PATAGONES

☎ 02920 / pop 27,938

Steep cobblestone streets and colonial stylings breathe a little romance into this languid river town. Patagones, as it is known locally, is both the gateway into Patagonia and the southernmost city in Buenos Aires province, 950km south of the capital via RN 3.

In 1779 Francisco de Viedma founded the town of Viedma on the southern bank of the Río Negro, and a fort on the northern bank, which later expanded to become Patagones. The region's first colonists hailed from the Spanish county of Maragateria in León (to this day, townspeople are still called *maragatos*) and fashioned their first dwellings in the side of the hills.

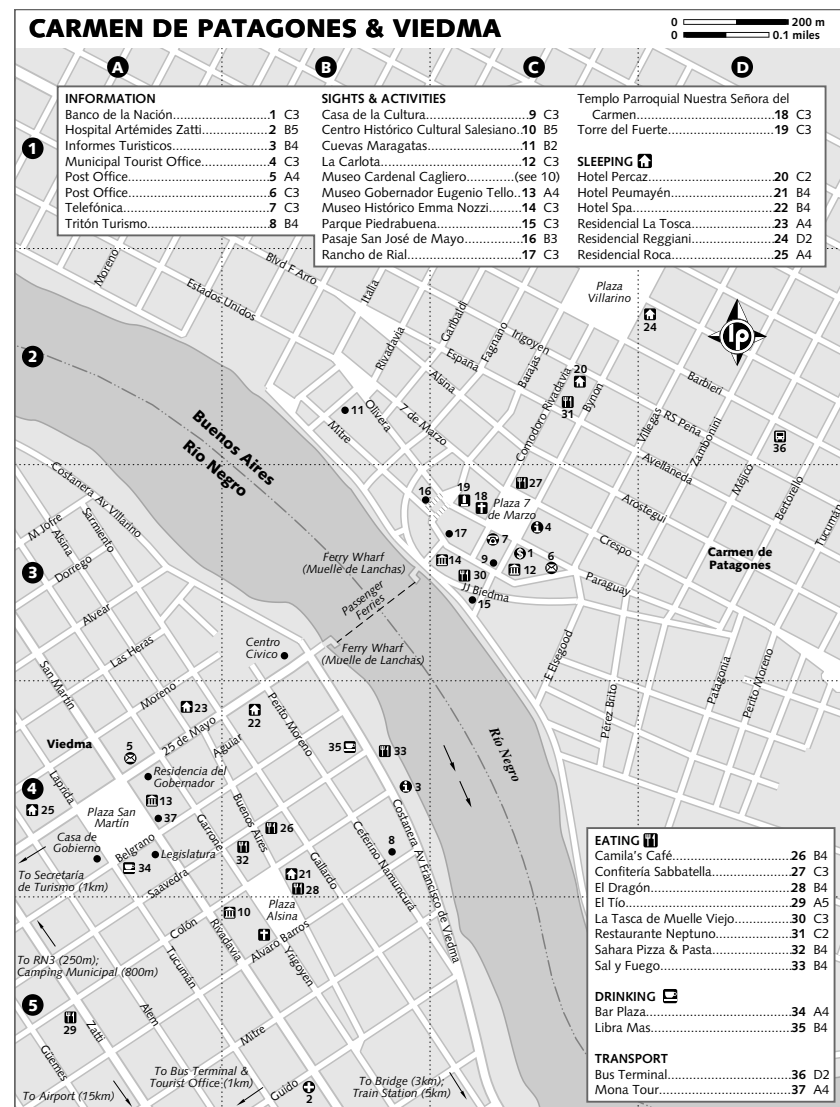
Patagones' claim to fame came in 1827, when its smaller and less-equipped forces repelled superior invaders during the war with Brazil. Every year, at the beginning of March, the Fiesta del Siete de Marzo celebrates this triumph with ten days of *música folklórica* (Argentine folk music), parades and traditional food and crafts.

## Information

**Banco de la Nación** (Paraguay 2) Has a 24-hour ATM.  
**Municipal tourist office** (☎ 461777, ext 253; turismopatagones@speedy.com.ar; Bynon 186; ☎ 7am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm & 6-9pm Sat & Sun Dec-Feb)  
**Post office** (Paraguay 38)  
**Telefónica** (cnr Olivera & Comodoro Rivadavia) Locutorio (private telephone office) and internet access.

## Sights

Check out the eager tourist office for maps and brochures. Patagones has more historic buildings than most Patagonian towns and it's a pleasure to explore them on foot.



Begin at **Plaza 7 de Marzo**; its original name, Plaza del Carmen, was changed after the 1827 victory over the Brazilians. Salesians built the **Templo Parroquial Nuestra Señora del Carmen** in 1883. Its image of the Virgin, dating from 1780, is southern Argentina's oldest, and two of the original seven Brazilian flags captured in 1827 are on the altar. Just west of the church,

**Torre del Fuerte** is the last vestige of the 1780 fort that once occupied the entire block.

Below the tower twin cannons, once used to guard the Patagonian frontier, flank the 1960s **Pasaje San José de Mayo** staircase leading to the riverside. At the base of the steps, the **Rancho de Rial** (Mitre 94) is an 1820 adobe that belonged to the town's first elected mayor. Three

blocks west, the **Cuevas Maragatas** (Maragatas Caves; Rivadavia s/n), excavated in the riverbank, sheltered the first Spanish families who arrived in 1779. Return to the base of the stairs and walk two blocks east, where the early-19th-century **Casa de la Cultura** (Mitre 27) was the site of a *tahona* (flour mill). Across the street, **La Carlota** (c/r Bynon & Mitre) is a former private residence (c 1800) decorated with typical 19th-century furnishings; ask about guided tours at the museum.

**Parque Piedrabuena** has a bust of Luis Piedrabuena, the naval officer responsible for saving countless shipwrecked sailors. A block west, the **Museo Histórico Emma Nozzi** (☎ 462729; admission AR\$1.50; ☞ 10am-noon & 2:30-4:30pm Mon-Fri, 5-7pm Sat) houses an impressive collection of artifacts from Argentina's southern frontier, including details on the town's former black slave population. Along the river are recreational *balnearios* (river beaches), popular spots for swimming and picnics in summer.

## Sleeping & Eating

Options for accommodations are better in Viedma, but it is worth the short ferry ride across the river for a meal and a stroll on Carmen de Patagones' historic colonial waterfront.

**Residencial Reggiani** (☎ 461384; Bynon 422; s/d/tr AR\$45/85/110) This rambling 20-room home is favored for its friendliness and location. The rooms with TV are warm but a bit dark and stale. There is also a recently added restaurant.

**Hotel Percz** (☎ 464104; c/r Comodoro Rivadavia & Irigoyen; s/d/tr with breakfast AR\$70/115/170) Kudos go to the staff at this old-fashioned hotel, who even help travelers find lodging when theirs is full. The clean, carpeted, no-frills rooms can be cramped, but there is central heating, twice-daily housekeeping service and wireless internet. Food at the 24-hour *confitería* (café offering light meals) is good.

**Confitería Sabbatella** (Comodoro Rivadavia 218; mains AR\$15; ☞ to 2am) Locals linger at Sabbatella for a shot of coffee and simple café fare. Its billiard table is the best place to hustle pool sharks.

**Restaurante Neptuno** (Comodoro Rivadavia 310; mains AR\$15-28; ☞ 7pm-late) When locals want options they head to this old-fashioned dining room, where the offerings range from tortillas and pizza to well-prepared meat dishes.

**La Tasca de Muelle Viejo** (JJ Biedma 30; mains AR\$22; ☞ dinner only) Whipping up tasty empanadas

and traditional dishes like *puchero*, a hearty stew thick with veggies, this bohemian riverside café overflows with warm ambience. The owner's paintings adorn the walls.

## Getting There & Around

Most travelers make bus, train and plane connections in Viedma. But most northbound buses also stop at Patagones' **bus terminal** (☎ 462666; c/r Barbieri & Méjico), with plenty of service to Bahía Blanca and Buenos Aires. Tickets for Tren Patagónico (Viedma to Bariloche) can be purchased at the bus terminal.

Two bridges connect Patagones with Viedma. The *balsa* (ferry) crosses the river to Viedma (AR\$1) every few minutes, from 6:30am to 10pm.

## VIEDMA

☎ 02920 / pop 80,000

Sharing the lush Río Negro with sister city Carmen de Patagones, Viedma, as the capital of Río Negro province, is comparatively bustling and prosperous. For travelers, it is a less-picturesque but more convenient base than next door, with a greater number of services and amenities. Social gatherings center on the riverfront, with upscale cafés and a jogging path close to downtown.

In 1779 Francisco de Viedma put ashore to found the city after his men started dying of fever and lack of water at Península Valdés. In 1879 it became the residence of the governor of Patagonia and the political locus of the country's enormous southern territory. A century later, the radical Alfonsín administration proposed moving the federal capital here from Buenos Aires but was crushingly defeated.

## Information

ATMs and internet cafés are in the center along Buenos Aires.

**Hospital Artémides Zatti** (☎ 422333; Rivadavia 351)

**Informes Turísticos** (☎ 427171; www.viedma.gov.ar in Spanish; Av Francisco de Viedma 51) Offers local and regional information on the waterfront.

**Post office** (c/r 25 de Mayo & San Martín)

**Secretaría de Turismo** (☎ 422150; www.rionegrotur.com.ar; Caseros 1425) Located 15 blocks southwest of the plaza, with brochures for the entire province.

**Tourist office** (☎ 427171; bus terminal) Offers lodging and transportation details.

**Tritón Turismo** (☎ 431131; Ceferino Namuncurá 78)

Changes traveler's checks, rents cars and runs tours.

## Sights & Activities

Summer activities include **kayaking** on the Río Negro and weekend **catamaran rides** (AR\$10). Ask individual launch operators at the pier about kayak rentals and river cruises.

The season for **sport fishing** on the Río Negro runs from November to early July, with rainbow trout (catch and release), silverside and carp. For information and licenses, consult *Informes Turísticos*, the Dirección de Pesca de Río Negro (☎ 420326) or fishing guides Eduardo Urriza (☎ 02920-15-626719) and Constantino Mikitiuk (☎ 426328).

In addition to exhibits on European settlement, the **Museo Gobernador Eugenio Tello** (☎ 425900; San Martín 263; admission free; ☞ 9am-1pm & 5:30-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-12:30pm & 5-7pm Sat) displays Tehuelche tools, artifacts, deformed skulls and skeletons.

The Salesian **Museo Cardenal Cagliero** (☎ 424190; Rivadavia 34; admission free; ☞ 7am-1:30pm Mon-Fri) features incredible ceiling paintings and a neat fish-vertebrae cane (check out the cardinal's office). It is housed in the **Centro Histórico Cultural Salesiano**, the former Vicariato de la Patagonia, a massive 1890 brick structure on the corner of Colón.

The tourist offices and Tritón Turismo organize tours of nearby attractions, including fishing trips and visits to El Cóndor parrot colony.

## Festivals & Events

In mid-January, the weeklong **Regata del Río Negro** (www.regatadelrionegro.com.ar) features the world's longest kayak race, a 500km paddle from Neuquén to Viedma.

## Sleeping

**Camping Municipal** (☎ 421341; RN 3 riverside at Río Negro; per person AR\$4; ☞ Nov-Mar) This shady riverside campground, 10 blocks west of RN 3, offers drab gravel sites and hot showers. Arrive via taxi (AR\$5) or the Comarca bus from downtown.

**Hotel Spa** (☎ 430459; spaiturbu@rnonline.com.ar; 25 de Mayo 174; s/d/tr with breakfast AR\$55/90/120; ☞) Given the name, you might expect more glamour. Nonetheless, this hotel with small, average rooms and hardwood floors is popular. Ask about fees for hot and dry saunas, or sneak a spin on the treadmill in the hallway.

**Residencial Roca** (☎ 431241; residenciatosca@hotmail.com; Roca 347; s/d/tr AR\$68/105/145; ☞) The family-friendly Roca is a throwback to another

time, but rooms are cavernous and desk attention is good. Rooms have delirious wallpaper designs and old TVs. Breakfast costs AR\$7 extra.

**Residencial La Tosca** (☎ 428508; residenciatosca@hotmail.com; Alsina 349; s/d/tr AR\$89/130/175) This elegant brick building with an old-fashioned lobby has an air of retirement home about it. Still, the rooms are large and snug, with carpeted walls and TVs. Basketball matches in the next-door gym mean some noisy evenings.

**Hotel Peumayén** (☎ 425222/234; Buenos Aires 334; s/d/tr AR\$89/130/190; ☞) This old business hotel is dated but well kept, with mint-green walls and carpeted rooms. Each floor has a small kitchen for *mate* (a tealike beverage) breaks. Your best bet is a 4th-floor room or those overlooking the plaza.

## Eating & Drinking

**Camila's Café** (c/r Saavedra & Buenos Aires; snacks AR\$8; ☞ breakfast, lunch & dinner; ☞) A pleasant, homey atmosphere best for breakfast, which branches out from *medialunas* (croissants) with fruit and egg plates. Popular for coffee, sandwiches or drinks.

**Bar Plaza** (☎ 428842; c/r Belgrano & Tucumán; snacks AR\$9; ☞ closed Sun) Probe Viedma's soul by eavesdropping on *ñoquis* (meaning literally gnocchis or government employees) quibbling about the economy over coffee and cigarettes. Look for live blues and tango on weekend evenings.

**El Tío** (c/r Zatti & Colón; mains AR\$9-15; ☞ 8:30pm-midnight, closed Mon) Don't hit the Tío in a rush. This hole-in-the-wall hangout is the perfect place to split a big bottle of beer and indulge in slow-cooked *parrilla* (mixed grill) – steaks, sausages and innards – tended by the owner himself.

**Libra Mas** (☎ 427181; Costanero Av Villarino 110; sandwiches AR\$10; ☞ 9am-3am) Settle into a sleek white leather armchair at this modern café-pub, perfect for sharing a *tabla* (cutting board with meat and cheeses) or fried calamari with drinks. It is the newest addition to the riverfront scene.

**El Dragón** (☎ 430691; Buenos Aires 366; buffet AR\$14; ☞ noon-3pm & 8:30-11:30pm) This palatable all-you-can eat buffet is as authentic as Patagonian-Chinese gets, with staff playing mah-jongg at spare tables in their off-hours. Meals are a bargain but drinks can be spendy.

**Sal y Fuego** (☎ 431259; Costanero Av Villarino; mains AR\$28) This hip riverfront hangout offers

classic Argentine dishes with a few surprises (like chicken in sweet-and-sour plum sauce or fresh coleslaw). In good weather you can sit outside.

**Sahara Pizza & Pasta** (☎ 421530; Saavedra 336; pizzas AR\$30) Pizzas go upscale at this white-linen pizzeria that also serves quality pastas. Try the pineapple and Serrano ham pizza.

## Getting There & Around

### AIR

**Aeropuerto Gobernador Castello** (VDM; ☎ 422001) is 15km southwest of town on RP 51; a taxi to the center costs AR\$8. **Aerolíneas Argentinas** (☎ 423033) flies three times a week to Buenos Aires (AR\$484). **LADE** (☎ 424420) lands here en route to Trelew (AR\$158), Mar del Plata (AR\$175), Comodoro Rivadavia (AR\$192) and Buenos Aires (AR\$243).

### BOAT

From the pier at the foot of 25 de Mayo, a frequent ferry service (AR\$1) connects Viedma and Carmen de Patagones from 6:30am until 10pm.

### BUS

Viedma's **bus terminal** (☎ 426850) is 13 blocks southwest of the plaza, a 20-minute walk.

To Puerto Madryn, **Don Otto** (☎ 425952) and **El Cóndor** (☎ 423714) offer the best service. To Bariloche, **3 de Mayo** (☎ 425839) goes via RN 23, while **El Valle** (☎ 427501) takes longer via RN 22 and RP 6.

For Balneario El Cóndor (AR\$3, half hour) and La Lobería (AR\$5, one hour), **Ceferino** (☎ 426691) leaves from Plaza Alsina six times daily in summer.

Destination	Cost (AR\$)	Duration (hr)
Bahía Blanca	25	3
Bariloche	110-150	14-15
Buenos Aires	80-150	13
Comodoro Rivadavia	121-144	10-13
Las Grutas	20	2½
Puerto Madryn	61-73	5-6
Trelew	69-81	8

### TRAIN

Among the last of Argentina's great long-distance trains, **Tren Patagónico** (☎ 422130; www.trenpatagonico.com.ar in Spanish) offers service replete with dining and cinema cars. It crosses the plains to Bariloche (economy/1st class/Pullman/bed AR\$40/53/93/160, 17 hours)

Mondays and Fridays at 6pm; children five to 12 pay half. Trains depart from the station on the southeast outskirts of town. Check the website for the current schedule, which changes often.

Tickets can also be purchased at **Mona Tour** (☎ 422933; info@monatur.com.ar; San Martín 225)

## COASTAL RÍO NEGRO

La Ruta de los Acanilados occupies a beautiful stretch along Río Negro's 400km Atlantic coastline. Repeated wave action has worn the ancient cliff faces (three to 13 million years old) to reveal a wealth of fossils. While the area teems with activity in the summer, it shuts down off-season.

**Balneario El Cóndor**, a resort 31km southeast of Viedma at the mouth of the Río Negro, has what's considered the largest parrot colony in the world, with 35,000 nests of burrowing parrots in its cliff faces. Don't miss the century-old lighthouse, Patagonia's oldest. Lodging options include **Hospedaje Río de los Sauces** (☎ 02920-497193; Calle 20 bis; d with breakfast AR\$100) and the RV-friendly **Camping Ina Lauquen** (☎ 02920-497218; cnr Calle 87 & Costanera; per person AR\$7; ☐), with grills, picnic tables, fast food and even internet.

There's a permanent southern sea lion colony at **La Lobería** (Reserva Faunística de Punta Bermeja), 60km from Viedma via RP 1, on the north coast of Golfo San Matías. The population peaks during the spring mating season, when males come ashore to fight other males and establish harems of up to 10 females. The females give birth from December onward. Visitors will find the observation balcony, directly above the mating beaches, safe and unobtrusive. Buses from Viedma pass within 3km of the colony.

At the northwest edge of Golfo San Matías, 179km west of Viedma along RN 3, the crowded resort of **Las Grutas** (The Grottoes; www.balneariolasgrutas.com in Spanish) owes its name to its eroded sea caves. Thanks to an exceptional tidal range, the beaches can expand for hundreds of meters or shrink to just a few. The **tourist office** (☎ 02934-497470; Galería Antares, Primera Bajada) has tide schedules. Buses leave hourly to San Antonio Oeste, 16km northeast, with more lodging.

Besides free meals for bus drivers, **Sierra Grande**, 125km south of Las Grutas, only has one thing going for it: gasoline at subsidized *precios patagónicos* (Patagonian prices). Given

that, most everyone fills up their tank, grabs an uninspired snack and carries on.

## PUERTO MADRYN

☎ 02965 / pop 57,791

This sheltered port facing Golfo Nuevo is best known as the gateway to the wildlife sanctuary of Península Valdés. Fast-growing with tourism and industry, it does retain a few small-town touches: the radio announces lost dogs and locals are welcoming and unhurried. Madryn holds its own as a modest beach destination, but from June to mid-December visiting right whales take center stage. From July to September the whales are so close they can be viewed without even taking a tour, from the coast 20km north of town or the 500m pier in town.

Founded by Welsh settlers in 1886, the town takes its name from Love Parry, Baron of Madryn. Statues along the *costanera* (seaside road) pay tribute to the Welsh: one to the role women have played, and the other, at the south end of town, to the Tehuelche, who helped the Welsh immigrants survive. Madryn's campus of the Universidad de la Patagonia is known for its marine biology department, and ecological centers promote conservation and education. The city is the second-largest fishing port in the country and home to Aluar, Argentina's first aluminum plant, built in 1974.

## Orientation

Puerto Madryn is just east of RN 3, 1371km south of Buenos Aires, 439km north of Comodoro Rivadavia and 65km north of Trelew. The action centers along the *costanera* and two main parallel avenues, Av Roca and 25 de Mayo. Bulevar Brown is the main drag alongside the beaches to the south.

## Information

Call centers and internet cafés abound in the center. Some travel agencies accept traveler's checks as payment for tours.

**Banco de la Nación** (9 de Julio 117) Has ATM and changes traveler's checks.

**Burboja's** (☎ 472217; Gobernador Maíz 440; ☒ closed Sun) Full- or self-service laundry.

**Dirección de Cultura** (Av Roca 444; showers AR\$1.50) Showers available downstairs, beneath the Museo de Arte Moderno.

**Hospital Subzonal** (☎ 451999; R Gómez 383)

**Post office** (cnr Belgrano & Gobernador Maíz)

**Presto-lav** (☎ 451526; Blvd Brown 605) Laundry pickup and delivery available.

**Recreo** (cnr 28 de Julio & Av Roca) Stocks a good selection of regional books, maps and a few English-language novels and guidebooks. There is another branch on the corner of 25 de Mayo and Roque Sáenz Peña.

**Telefónica** (cnr Av Roca & 9 de Julio; ☎ 8am-midnight) Big call center with internet access.

**Thaler Cambio** (☎ 455858; Av Roca 493; ☎ 9:30am-1pm & 6-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm & 7-9pm Sat & Sun) Poorer rates for traveler's checks.

**Tourist office** (☎ 453504, 456067; www.madryn.gov.ar/turismo in Spanish; Av Roca 223; ☎ 7am-10pm Mon-Fri, 8am-11pm Sat & Sun Dec-Feb, reduced hours off-season) Helpful and efficient staff, and there's usually an English or French speaker on duty. Check the *libro de reclamos* (complaint book) for traveler tips. There's another helpful desk at the bus terminal.

## Sights

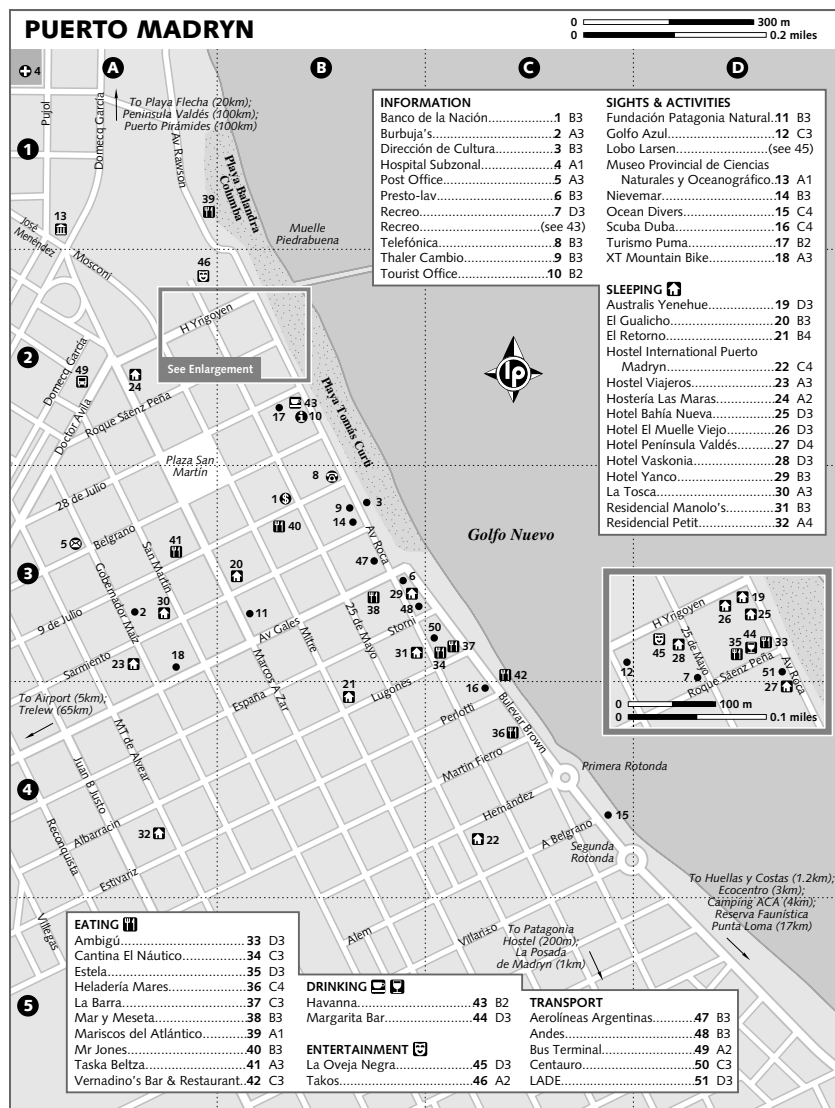
### ECOCENTRO

Celebrating the area's marine treasures, **Ecocentro** (☎ 457470; www.ecocentro.org.ar in Spanish; J Verne 3784; adult/concession AR\$21/5; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun) is a masterpiece of interactive displays that combine artistic sensitivity with extensive scientific research. Exhibits explore the area's unique marine ecosystem, the breeding habits of right whales, dolphin sounds, stories of southern elephant-seal harems, a touch-friendly tide pool and more. Grab an English-language guide to the exhibits at the front desk. The building itself is equally impressive. The three-story tower acts as a library, with the top story, all glass and comfy couches, a great place to read, write or contemplate the fragile ocean community. Whales may be spotted from here.

It's an enjoyable 40-minute walk or 15-minute bike ride along the *costanera* to the Ecocentro. Shuttles run three times daily from the tourist office on Av Roca, or you can catch a Línea 2 bus to the last stop (La Universidad) and walk 1km.

## MUSEO PROVINCIAL DE CIENCIAS NATURALES Y OCEANOGRÁFICO

Feeling up strands of seaweed and ogling preserved octopus are part of the hands-on approach of this **museum** (☎ 451139; cnr Domecq García & Menéndez; admission AR\$6; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3-7pm Mon-Fri, 3-7pm Sat & Sun) in the 1917 Chalet Pujol. A winding staircase leads into nine small rooms of marine and land mammal exhibits and preserved specimens, plus collections of Welsh wares. The explanations are in Spanish and



geared to youth science classes, but it's visually informative and creatively presented. Twist up to the cupola for views of the port.

#### FUNDACIÓN PATAGONIA NATURAL

This well-run nongovernmental organization (☎ 451920; www.patagonianatural.org in Spanish; Marcos

A Zar 760; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri) promotes conservation and monitors environmental issues in Patagonia. In a converted house, volunteers diligently nurse injured birds and marine mammals back to health. The friendly staff is happy to answer questions about coastal areas in the region.

## Activities

### DIVING

With interesting shipwrecks and sea life nearby, Madryn and the Península Valdés have become Argentina's diving capitals. **Lobo Larsen** (☎ 02965-15-516314, 15-681004; www.lobolarsen.com; H Yrigoyen 144) and **Scuba Duba** (☎ 452699; www.scubaduba.com.ar in Spanish; Blvd Brown 893) are both quality PADI-affiliated operators. **Golfo Azul** (☎ 471649; www.pinosub.com in Spanish; H Yrigoyen 200) sells equipment. Most of the *balnearios* also have operators offering diving, including **Ocean Divers** (☎ 472569, 02965-15-660865; www.oceandivers.com.ar in Spanish; Balneario Yoquina). Dives start at around AR\$120; some agencies also offer courses, night dives and multiday excursions.

### WINDSURFING & KAYAKING

In high season, a hut next to **Vernadino's** (Blvd Brown 860) offers lessons and rents out regular and wide boards and kayaks by the hour. South of Muelle Piedrabuena, **Playa Tomás Curti** is a popular windsurfing spot.

### BIKING & HIKING

**XT Mountain Bike** (☎ 472232; Av Gales btwn Gobernador Maiz & San Martín) rents beach cruisers and mountain bikes (AR\$30 per day) in good shape. Several other outfits along Av Roca advertise rentals and guided tours; inspect the gears before heading out on a long ride. Guide service **Huellas y Costas** (☎ 02965-15-680515; www.huellasycostas.com; Blvd Brown 1900) offers coastal hiking, mountain biking, kayaking and camping adventures in small groups with bilingual guides.

### Tours

Countless agencies sell tours to Península Valdés (p436), costing from AR\$90 to AR\$150 (not including the AR\$40 park admission fee or whale watching, which ranges from AR\$75 to AR\$150). Most hotels and hostels also offer tours; it's always best to get recommendations from fellow travelers before choosing. Ask how large the bus was, if it came with an English-speaking guide, where they ate and what they saw where – different tour companies often visit different locations. Remember to take water, as it's a long drive to the reserve.

Those most interested in wildlife should bring binoculars and may find it more enjoyable to stay overnight in Puerto Pirámides (p437). Tours to Punta Tombo (p448) from Puerto Madryn cost about the same as those

offered from Trelew (p444), but they require a couple of hours extra driving time and thus less time with the penguins.

Recommended tour companies:

**Nievmar** (☎ 455544; www.nievmartours.com.ar in Spanish; Av Roca 493) Amex representative. Excursions include whale watching and visits to sea lion colonies and the petrified forest.

**Turismo Puma** (☎ 471482; www.turismopuma.com in Spanish; 28 de Julio 46) Small groups, nature walks and excursions incorporating whale watching.

## Sleeping

Reserve ahead, especially if you want a double room. If you are caught short, check with the tourist office, which posts a comprehensive lodging list with prices that include nearby *estancias* (ranches) and rental apartments (double occupancy from AR\$100 per day). Budget rates don't generally include breakfast, and midrange accommodations charge solo travelers the double rate in high season. High-season rates (given here) apply from mid-October through March.

### BUDGET

All hostels have kitchens and offer pickup from the bus terminal, but most are a short, flat walk away.

**Camping ACA** (☎ 452952; Camino al Indio; s/d occupancy AR\$21/26; ☎ closed May-Aug) These 800 gravel sites are sheltered by trees to break the incessant wind. Although there are no cooking facilities, a limited selection of snacks (and sometimes prepared meals) is available. From downtown, city bus 2 goes within 500m of the campground; get off at the last stop, called 'La Universidad.'

**our pick La Tosca** (☎ 456133; www.latoscahostel.com; Sarmiento 437; dm AR\$30, d AR\$85-95) A cozy guesthouse where the owners greet you by name, La Tosca is the creation of a well-traveled couple. Although dorm beds are short, they sport good mattresses and convenient shelves. Perks include a grassy courtyard, bike rentals and the option of dinner (AR\$25) featuring healthy mains, fresh veggies and dessert. It is now open year-round.

**El Retorno** (☎ 456044; www.elretornohostel.com.ar; Mitre 798; dm/d AR\$32/120) This spotless refurbished home feels cozy and familiar – travelers will recognize Gladys, the host, as an eager den mother. Dorms have lockers and some have en suite bathrooms. Extras include an upstairs

solarium, barbecue area, laundry, bike rental and table tennis.

**El Gualicho** (☎ 454163; www.elgualicho.com.ar in Spanish; Marcos A Zar 480; dm/d AR\$35/130; ☑) Boasting a hip and highly attentive staff, this hostel has nice dorms with wood-frame bunks. Ample shared spaces, including an interior patio and comfy living and dining areas, further the appeal. Some doubles share a bathroom.

**Hostel Viajeros** (☎ 456457; www.hostelviajeros.com; Gobernador Maiz 545; dm/d AR\$35/120; ☑) Consider it a practical option: these plain, no-nonsense rooms have TVs and bathrooms, though doubles are scrunched in. Benefits include a large *quincha* (cabaña) with dining area and barbecue, plus free pickup from the bus terminal.

**Patagonia Hostel** (☎ 450155; www.hipatagonia.com in Spanish; Av Roca 1040; dm/d AR\$40/130) Guests are easily at ease in this cool and cozy suburban-style home, the newest hostel in Madryn. It's a bit off the grid, but host Gaston goes the extra mile to help travelers, and the ambience of the grassy yard and well-cared-for shared spaces is inviting.

**Residencial Manolo's** (☎ 472390; manolos@speedy.com.ar; Av Roca 763; d/tr AR\$45/60) The secret is out on this yellow house surrounded by high-rises; it's nearly always full. Inveterate bargain hunters should bring the phrasebook and try out their 'vos' – English speakers are quoted higher rates.

## MIDRANGE

**Hotel Vaskonia** (☎ 472581; buce23@infovia.com.ar; 25 de Mayo 43; s/d/tr AR\$60/80/100) Style fatigue besets this longtime lodging with satin bedcovers and mismatched tiles. But it is super clean and central.

**Hostería Las Maras** (☎ 453215; www.hosterialasmaras.com.ar; Marcos A Zar 64; s/d/tr standard with breakfast AR\$63/74/88, superior AR\$80/90/105; ☑) Brick walls, exposed beams and wicker furniture craft an intimate setting ideal for couples. Standards are bright and prim, but the space is tight. Superior rooms boast king-sized beds, flat-screen TVs and stylish design elements. All rooms have cable TV.

**Residencial Petit** (☎ 451460; hotelpetit@arnet.com.ar; MT de Alvear 845; d AR\$110) These immaculate whitewashed motel rooms seem straight out of Florida. The management is attentive and rooms are furnished with desks and ceiling fans. Though it's more than a 10-minute walk to the *costanera*, drivers will appreciate the roadside parking.

**Hotel El Muelle Viejo** (☎ 471284; www.muelleviejo.com in Spanish; H Yrigoyen 38; s/d/tr AR\$105/125/145) A pleasant couple have this older hotel ship-shape, with crisp linen curtains, plump beds and pale wood furniture. Rooms have bathtubs and cable TV. In high season they require a three-night stay for reservations and don't offer single rates. Superior rooms run AR\$20 extra.

**Hotel Yanco** (☎ 471581; hotelyanco@hotmail.com; Av Roca 626; s/d/tr AR\$110/130/168) This old-style charmer has an ancient switchboard and tidy rooms that don't look much newer. Showers have low separations so watch for overflow. Rooms facing the *avenida* are noisy, while whales have been spotted from those facing the ocean.

**Hostel Internacional Puerto Madryn** (☎ 474426; http://usuarios.advance.com.ar/hi-pm; 25 de Mayo 1136; d/tr/apt AR\$120/150/200; ☑ closed May-Sep) While most lodging in town is bustling, this property remains quiet. On spacious grounds in a residential neighborhood, this former hostel has been converted to large private rooms with bathrooms. Guests get shared kitchen access and bus terminal pickups.

**Hotel Península Valdés** (☎ 471292; www.hotelpeninsula.com.ar; Av Roca 155; d with/without view AR\$172/152; ☑ ☑) Ample rooms have comfy quilted bedding, temperature controls, piped-in music and cable TV. This high-rise caters to tour groups with a spa, massage and beauty parlor and ocean views – request a room above the tree line.

## TOP END

**La Posada de Madryn** (☎ 474087; www.la-posada.com.ar; Mathews 2951; s/d AR\$198/232; ☑) This modern inn amid rolling green lawns offers a quiet alternative to lodging in town. Its prim rooms with bright accents have heating controls and cable TV. It's in a residential neighborhood – catch a taxi from the center.

**Hotel Bahía Nueva** (☎ 450045/145; www.bahianueva.com.ar; Av Roca 67; s/d with breakfast AR\$320/405; ☑) Stretching to resemble an English countryside retreat, Bahía Nueva distinguishes itself with a foyer library and flouncy touches. Its 40 rooms are well groomed, but only a few have ocean views. Highlights include a bar with billiards and a TV (mostly to view movies and documentaries), and tour information. The breakfast buffet offers fresh regional pastries. Non-Argentines booking ahead may be quoted higher rates.

**Australis Yenehue** (☎ 471496; Av Roca 33; www.australiset.com.ar; s/d with view AR\$678/754) A stylish new addition, this towering hotel-spa offers great sea views and a comfortable glassed-in 2nd-floor lounge. However, service can be sluggish and the pricing excessive for what's on offer.

## Eating & Drinking

**Havanna** (☎ 473373; cnr Av Roca & 28 de Julio; snacks AR\$6-12; ☑) This smart, smoky café can cure your energy slump with sugar-bomb *alfajores* (cookie sandwiches) and specialty coffees.

**Heladería Mares** (☎ 470705; Martín Fierro 85; ice cream AR\$9; ☑ 10am-midnight) Doing a brisk business in creamy *helados* (ice creams), this excellent beachfront parlor also offers delivery. Unless you're thirsty, avoid the beer flavor.

**Margarita Bar** (☎ 475871; www.margaritapub.com in Spanish; cnr Av Roca & Roque Sáenz Peña; set lunch AR\$19; ☑ 11am-4am) With a trendy edge, this low-lit brick haunt has a laundry list of cocktails, a friendly bar staff and live music (such as jazz, bossa nova or drumming) on Wednesdays. The set lunches are healthy and good value.

**Cantina El Náutico** (☎ 471404; Av Roca 790; lunch special AR\$25) This popular nook (see the photos of Argentine celebs) offers old-fashioned ambience, from the polished bar to the white linens. Lunch specials offer the best deals; drinks are expensive.

**Estela** (☎ 451573; Roque Sáenz Peña 27; mains AR\$25-40; ☑ noon-2:30pm & 8pm-midnight, closed Mon) The sweet smell of garlic *sautéing* in the kitchen will stop you in your tracks if you're outside. Billed as the town's best *parrilla* (steak restaurant), Estela also does nice pastas in an intimate, unpretentious setting often packed with locals.

**our pick** **Mr Jones** (☎ 475368; 9 de Julio 116; mains AR\$28; ☑ dinner) With a wealth of yummy stouts and reds, homemade pot pie and sausages, Mr Jones will satiate your appetite for all things German. The food is good and reasonably authentic; the pub atmosphere of wooden booths and crowded passages proves fun.

**Mariscos del Atlántico** (☎ 02965-15-552500; Av Rawson 288; mains AR\$28-40) You might expect a bit more from the only seafood restaurant in town stocked by artisan fisherman, but there is good local ambience. It is hidden behind Club Náutico, 20m past the arches and upstairs.

**Vernadino's Bar & Restaurant** (☎ 473715; Blvd Brown 860; set menu AR\$35; ☑ breakfast, lunch & dinner) With unbeatable beachfront atmosphere, Vernadino's white-linen tables are a hot spot

for drinks and dinner. Tempura vegetables and wok dishes are some of the savory offerings. There's patio seating too.

**Mar y Meseta** (☎ 458740; Av Gales 32; mains AR\$35) Colorful and cozy, this elegant seafood restaurant dishes up clever creations for a handful of tables. The service is good, although the food is not always spot-on. Reserve ahead to guarantee a table.

**Ambigü** (☎ 472451; cnr Av Roca & Roque Sáenz Peña; mains AR\$40) With a focus on fresh ingredients and creative combinations, Ambigü masters a gamut of dishes, including seafood – try the *langostinos* (prawns) in sea salt – and pizza. The setting is an elegant renovation of a historic bank building, backlit by warm colors.

**La Barra** (☎ 454279; Blvd Brown 779; mains AR\$40) Fashionable but somewhat overpriced, La Barra feels like a date destination offering fussy service and a wide selection, including *parrilla*, thin-crust pizzas and heaping salad bowls.

**Taska Beltza** (☎ 02965-15-668085; 9 de Julio 345; mains AR\$50; ☑ closed Mon, dinner only Tue) For a big night out, try the Basque cooking of Chef Negro, who expertly steams fish and crafts tasty pastas. Portions are small, leaving room for homemade banana ice cream drizzled with dark chocolate and *dulce de leche* (milk caramel). Reservations are advised.

## Entertainment

Bars and dance clubs come and go, so ask locals what's *de moda* (in) for the moment.

**Takos** (☎ 02965-15-401665; P Escardo 171) With a hearty dose of *rock nacional* (Argentine rock) and pool tables, this hotspot offers a casual atmosphere for the twenty-something crowd.

**La Oveja Negra** (H Yrigoyen 144) This intimate bar is decked in burlap and revolutionary paraphernalia – long live rock and folk, which keep the crowds bubbling over at this fun bar. It also serves hearty pub grub.

## Getting There & Away

Due to limited connections, it pays to book in advance, especially for travel to the Andes.

## AIR

Though Puerto Madryn has its own modern airport, most commercial flights still arrive in Trelew (see p445), 65km south.

**Aeropuerto El Tehuelche** (PMY; ☎ 456774) is 5km west of town, at the junction with RN 3. From here, **LADE** (☎ 451256; Av Roca 119) puddle

jumps to Esquel (AR\$181), El Calafate (AR\$374), Río Gallegos (AR\$371), Buenos Aires (AR\$258), Río Grande (AR\$400) and Ushuaia (AR\$427).

Newcomer **Andes** (☎ 452355; www.andesonline.com; Av Roca 624) flies to Buenos Aires' Aeroparque (AR\$665) three times a week. **Aerolíneas Argentinas** (☎ 451998; Av Roca 427) flies only to nearby Trelew – but it does have a ticketing representative here.

## BUS

Puerto Madryn's full-service **bus terminal** (☎ 451789; Doctor Avila, btwn Independencia & Necochea), behind the historic 1889 Estación del Ferrocarril Patagónico, has an ATM and a helpful tourist information desk.

Bus companies include **Andesmar/Central Argentino** (☎ 473764), **Don Otto** (☎ 451675), **28 de Julio** (☎ 472056), **Mar y Valle** (☎ 472056), **Que Bus** (☎ 455805), **Ruta Patagonia** (☎ 454572), **TAC** (☎ 474938) and **TUS** (☎ 451962).

The bus to Puerto Pirámides leaves at 9:30am and returns to Madryn at 6:30pm.

Destination	Cost (AR\$)	Duration (hr)
Bariloche	120-162	14-15
Buenos Aires	182-208	18-20
Comodoro Rivadavia	59-88	6-8
Córdoba	160	18
Esquel	88-118	7-9
Mendoza	163-224	23-24
Neuquén	110	12
Puerto Pirámides	11	1½
Río Gallegos	134-169	15-20
Trelew	7.50	1
Viedma	61-73	5-6

## Getting Around

Renting a bicycle (see p433) is ideal for travel in and around town.

## TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

Southbound 28 de Julio buses to Trelew, which run hourly Monday through Saturday between 6am and 10pm, will stop at Trelew's airport on request.

**Flamenco Tour** (☎ 455505) runs a door-to-door shuttle service (AR\$10) to Madryn's airport, while **Eben-Ezer** (☎ 472474) runs a service (AR\$20) to Trelew's airport.

## CAR

Before renting a car to visit Península Valdés, consider that a roundtrip is a little over 300km.

A group sharing expenses can make a rental a relatively reasonable and more flexible alternative to bus tours – if you don't have to pay for extra kilometers.

Rental rates vary, depending on the mileage allowance and age and condition of the vehicle. The family-owned **Centaurio** (☎ 02965-15-340400; www.centaurorentacar.com.ar; Av Roca 733) gets high marks as an attentive and competitively priced rental agency. Basic vehicles run AR\$199 per day, with insurance and 400km included.

Northbound motorists should note that the last station with cheap gas is 139km north in Sierra Grande.

## AROUND PUERTO MADRYN

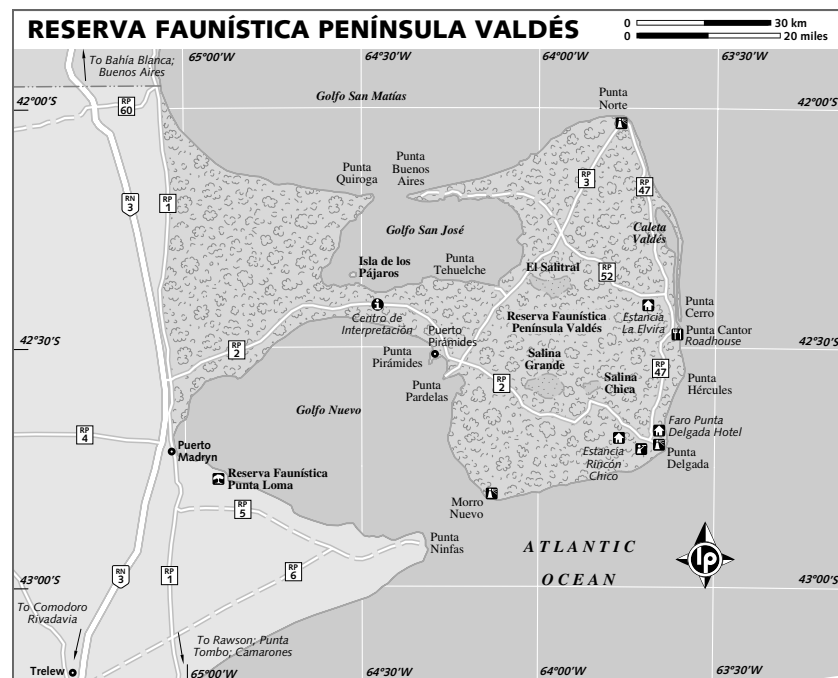
Home to a permanent sea lion colony and cormorant rookery, the **Reserva Faunística Punta Loma** (admission AR\$20) is 17km southwest of Puerto Madryn via a good but winding gravel road. The overlook is about 15m from the animals, best seen during low tides. Many travel agencies organize two-hour tours (AR\$50) according to the tide schedules; otherwise, check tide tables and hire a car or taxi, or make the trek via bicycle.

Twenty kilometers north of Puerto Madryn via RP 1 is **Playa Flecha** observatory, a recommended whale-watching spot.

## RESERVA FAUNÍSTICA PENÍNSULA VALDÉS

Unesco World Heritage site Península Valdés is one of South America's finest wildlife reserves. More than 80,000 visitors per year visit this sanctuary, which has a total area of 3600 sq km and more than 400km of coastline. The wildlife viewing is truly exceptional: the peninsula is home to sea lions, elephant seals, guanacos, rheas, Magellanic penguins and numerous seabirds. But the biggest attraction is the endangered ballena franca austral (southern right whale). The warmer, more enclosed waters along the Golfo Nuevo, Golfo San José and the coastline near Caleta Valdés from Punta Norte to Punta Hércules are prime breeding zones for right whales between June and mid-December. For details on the region's wildlife, see p440.

One doesn't expect lambs alongside penguins, but sheep *estancias* occupy most of the peninsula's interior, which includes one of the world's lowest continental depressions, the salt flats of Salina Grande and Salina Chica, 42m below sea level. At the turn of the 20th



century, Puerto Pirámides, the peninsula's only village, was the shipping port for the salt extracted from Salina Grande.

About 17km north of Puerto Madryn, paved RP 2 branches off RN 3 across the Istmo Carlos Ameghino to the entrance of the **reserva** (admission AR\$40; valid for 2 days). The **Centro de Interpretación** (☎ 8am-8pm), 22km beyond the entrance, focuses on natural history, displays a full right whale skeleton and has material on the peninsula's colonization, from the area's first Spanish settlement at Fuerte San José to later mineral exploration. Don't miss the stunning panoramic view from the observation tower.

If you are sleeping in Puerto Madryn but plan to visit the park on two consecutive days, ask a ranger to validate your pass before you exit the park so you can re-enter without charges.

## Puerto Pirámides

☎ 02965 / pop humans 250, whales 400-600

Set amid sandy cliffs on a bright blue sea, this sleepy old salt port now bustles with tour buses and visitors clad in orange life jackets.

Whales mean whopping and ever-growing tourism here, but at the end of the day the tour buses split and life in this two-street town regains its cherished slug's pace.

Av de las Ballenas is the main drag, which runs perpendicular to Primera (1era) Bajada, the first road to the beach, stuffed with tour outfitters. A small **tourist office** (☎ 495084; www.puertopiramide.gov.ar; 1era Bajada) helps with travelers' needs. New additions include internet at the **Telefónica** (Av de las Ballenas) and a cash machine at **Banco de Chubut** (Av de las Ballenas).

## ACTIVITIES

While most visitors focus on whale watching, adventure options – including **diving**, **snorkeling** and **mountain biking** – are growing. Friendly **Patagonia Explorers** (☎ 02965-15-340619; www.patagoniaexplorers.com; 1era bajada) offers guided treks and sea-kayaking trips (AR\$90, two hours). Area *estancias* offer **horseback riding**. But you don't have to stray far from town to find adventure: just join the local kids at the **sandboarding** hill at the end of the second road down to the beach.

Visitors can walk to the **sea lion colony** less than 5km from town (though mostly uphill).



It is a magnificent spot to catch the sunset, occasional whale sightings and views across the Golfo Nuevo toward Puerto Madryn. Be sure to time your visit with the tides (high tides finds all the sea lions swimming out to sea).

### Whale Tours

This is the place to glimpse spy-hopping, breaching and tailing cetaceans on a **whale-watching excursion** (AR\$75 to AR\$150, children under 12 half-price), arranged in Puerto Madryn or Puerto Pirámides.

When choosing a tour, ask other travelers about their experiences and check what kind of boat will be used: smaller, Zodiac-style inflatable rafts offer more intimacy than the larger bulldozer variety. By law, outfitters are not allowed within 100m of whales without cutting the motor, nor allowed to pursue them.

Check your outfitter's policies. When the port is closed due to bad weather, tour bookings are usually honored the following day (although these days are more crowded too). Outside of whale-watching season (June to December), boat trips aren't worthwhile unless you adore sea lions and shorebirds.

The following is a partial list of reputable outfitters:

**Bottazzi** (☎ 474110; www.titobottazzi.com in Spanish; 1era Bajada; sunset cruise AR\$150) Well worth the cost – especially if you can go out with Tito himself, an old sea dog with ample experience. Sunset cruises include a *picada* (shared appetizer plate) and glass of wine at Restingas afterwards.

**HydroSport** (☎ 495065; www.hydrosport.com.ar; 1era Bajada) Runs sunset tours and has naturalists and submarine audio systems on board.

**Whales Argentina** (☎ 495015; www.whalesargentina.com.ar; 1era Bajada; catamaran/semi-rigid raft AR\$75/150) Offers quality trips with a bilingual guide.

### SLEEPING

If you're interested in watching wildlife, it's worth staying overnight, instead of trying to see everything in a daylong sprint from Puerto Madryn. Campers gloat about hearing whales' eerie cries and huffing blow holes in the night – it can be a truly extraordinary experience.

You will have to get a voucher from your hotel if you plan to exit and re-enter the park, so as to not pay the park entry fee twice. Watch for signs advertising rooms, cabins and apartments for rent along the main drag.

### Budget

**Camping Municipal** (☎ 495084; per person AR\$4) Convenient sheltered gravel sites with clean toilets, a store and hot pay showers (AR\$2), down the road behind the gas station. Come early in summer to stake your spot. Avoid camping on the beach: high tide is very high and has washed sleeping logs away.

**Hostel Bahía Ballenas** (☎ 474110; Av de las Ballenas s/n; dm with breakfast AR\$35; ☑) Bright but bare-bones, this brick hostel is a welcome addition to a town with few budget services. Kitchen use, lockers with keys, TV and internet are included.

**Casa de Tía Alicia** (☎ 495046; Av de las Ballenas s/n; per person AR\$60) Backpackers praise the *buena onda* (good vibes) at this old tin house. The rooms have windows and share two bathrooms. Ask about the private tours.

**Hospedaje El Medano** (☎ 495032; Av de las Ballenas s/n; s/d AR\$35/50) If Casa de Tía Alicia is full, try this nearby option, of similar quality.

### Midrange

**Estancia del Sol** (☎ 495007; Av de las Ballenas s/n; d/tr AR\$120/145) The earnest owners do their best to ensure a pleasant stay in the modest rooms. It's popular with students and families and has a decent eatery.

**Refugio de Luna** (☎ 495083; Av de las Ballenas s/n; d/tr AR\$150/250) Choose from spacious and inviting rooms in the main house, or a crunched but lovely guest cabin, perched above the house with excellent views. Breakfast, including homemade wholemeal bread, is extra and afternoon tea may be available to nonguests.

**Motel ACA** (☎ 495004; Av Roca s/n; s/d/tr AR\$110/160/195) The 16 noisy beachfront motel rooms have heating and cable TV. The attached restaurant has good views and serves fresh seafood.

### Top End

**Restingas Hotel** (☎ 495101; www.lasrestingas.com; 1era Bajada; d garden/oceanview AR\$183/240; meals AR\$50; ☑) Mixed reviews beset this lavender luxury hotel with spa. While service appears lax and sanitation could bear improvement, watching whales from your bedroom is a big plus. Guests do praise the abundant buffet breakfast, and the oceanfront restaurant is open to nonguests.

**Paradise** (☎ 495030; www.hosteriaparadise.com.ar; 2da Bajada; s/d AR\$314/377; ☑) These 12 attractive, tiled, brick-walled rooms are expansive and

cool. Some have views and Jacuzzi tubs. The more informal cabins are good options for groups and families. Outside of the whale-watching season, rates are 50% lower.

### EATING & DRINKING

Restaurants flank the beachfront, down the first street to the right as you enter town. Note that water here is desalinated: sensitive stomachs should stick to the bottled stuff. If self-catering, it's best to haul your groceries from Puerto Madryn.

**Towanda** (1era Bajada; mains AR\$15; ☎ 9am-6pm) This friendly café is ideal for an espresso and pressed sandwiches while waiting for your tour to depart.

**Quimey Quipan** (☎ 458609; 1era Bajada; mains AR\$15-31; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Breakfast, towering sandwiches and no-frills set seafood menus are dished out from this average café to a steady stream of passersby.

**La Estación** (☎ 495047; Av de las Ballenas s/n; mains AR\$17-28; ☎ breakfast-late) This happy house is the spot to knock back drinks; there are also good pasta dishes and breakfast service. It's opposite the YPF gas station, with a wooden deck for outdoor dining.

**Pub Paradise** (☎ 495030; Av de las Ballenas s/n; mains AR\$21-40) This popular tour-group stop is also a hit with the locals. Few come for the food; instead, grab a cold one and enjoy the buzz of activity while sunset paints the bluffs.

**Margarita Bar** (Av de las Ballenas s/n; ☎ 8pm-late) This sleek bar specializes in cocktail o'clock, with a deep shelf of hard liquor and a long drinks list. There are also branches in Trelew and Puerto Madryn.

### GETTING THERE & AROUND

During summer, the Mar y Valle bus service travels from Puerto Madryn to Puerto Pirámides (AR\$11, 1½ hours) at 9.30am and returns to Madryn at 6.30pm, with more limited service in the off-season. Bus tours from Puerto Madryn may allow passengers to get off at Puerto Pirámides.

### Around Puerto Pirámides

If you're driving around the peninsula, take it easy. Roads are *ripio* (gravel) and washboard, with sandy spots that grab the wheels. If you're in a rental car, make sure you get all the details on the insurance policy. Hitchhiking here is nearly impossible and bike travel is long and unnervingly windy.

### ISLA DE LOS PÁJAROS

In Golfo San José, 800m north of the isthmus, this bird sanctuary is off-limits to humans, but visible through a powerful telescope. It contains a replica of a chapel built at Fuerte San José. See the boxed text, below, to find out how this small island figures into Antoine de St-Exupéry's *The Little Prince*.

### THE LITTLE PRINCE

From an apartment in Manhattan in 1941, a French pilot and writer, in exile from the battlefields of Europe, scripted what would become one of the most-read children's fables, *The Little Prince*. Antoine St-Exupéry, then 40 years old, had spent the previous 20 years flying – in the Sahara, the Pyrenees, Egypt and Patagonia, where he was director of Aeropostal Argentina from 1929 to 1931. Intertwined in the lines of *The Little Prince* and Asteroid B612 are images of Patagonia that stayed with him while flying over the barren landscape and braving the incessant winds.

It has become popular legend that the shape of Isla de los Pájaros, off the coast of Península Valdés, inspired the elephant-eating boa constrictor (or hat, as you may see it), while the perfectly conical volcanoes on the asteroid owe their shape to the volcanoes St-Exupéry flew over en route to Punta Arenas, Chile. The author's illustrations show the little prince on the peaks of mountains, unquestionably those in the Fitz Roy Range (one such peak now bears his name). And, possibly, meeting two young daughters of a French immigrant after an emergency landing in Concordia, near Buenos Aires, helped mold the character of the prince.

St-Exupéry never witnessed the influence his mythical royal character would have. In 1944, just after the first publication of *The Little Prince*, he disappeared during a flight to join French forces-in-exile stationed in Algiers.

St-Exupéry's years in Patagonia also figure in two critically acclaimed novels, *Night Flight* and *Wind, Sand and Stars*, both worthwhile reads on long Patagonia trips. Or simply watch the miles go by and, every now and then, as the little prince requested, try to draw a sheep.



## PATAGONIA WILDLIFE

You don't have to be a whale groupie to be awed by the animals along Southern Argentina's rugged coast. The chance to view a cast of wild characters – penguins, dolphins, killer whales, sea lions and elephant seals – up close makes these lonely Atlantic shores a must to visit.

### Magellanic Penguin

**What:** *Sphenicus magellanicus*; in Spanish pingüino magellánico

**When:** August to April, peak season December through February

**Where:** Península Valdés, Punta Tombo, Cabo Dos Bahías, Seno Otway (Chile)

Referred to locally as the jackass penguin for its characteristic braying sound, the Magellanic penguin is black to brown in shading and has two black-and-white bars going across the upper chest. They average 45cm in height and weigh about 3.15kg. Winters are spent at sea, but males arrive on land in late August, followed by territorial fights in September as burrows and nests are prepared. In October females lay their eggs. Come mid-November, when eggs are hatched, males and females take turns caring for and feeding the chicks with regurgitated squid and small fish. In December it's a madhouse of hungry demanding chicks, adults coming in and out of the sea with food, and predatory birds trying to pick out the weaklings. In January chicks start to molt and take their first steps into the sea, and by February it's a traffic jam at the beach as chicks take to the water. By March juveniles start their migration north, followed in April by the adults.

Penguins are awkward on land, but in the water they are swift and graceful, reaching speeds of up to 8km/h. They are also naturally curious, though if approached too quickly they scamper into their burrows or toboggan back into the water. They will bite if you get too close. The least disruptive way to observe them is to sit near the burrows and wait for them to come to you.

Over a million pairs of these penguins exist, but their populations are threatened by human activity and oil spills.

### Southern Right Whale

**What:** *Eubalaena australis*; in Spanish ballena franca austral

**When:** June to mid-December, peak season September and October

**Where:** Golfo Nuevo and Golfo San José, Península Valdés

Averaging nearly 12m in length and weighing more than 27 tonnes, southern right whales enter the shallow waters of Península Valdés in the spring to breed and bear young. Females, which are larger than males, will copulate a year after giving birth. A female may pick out the best partner by fending off the pack of males trailing her for hours to see which one endures. For the past three decades, researchers have been able to track individual whales by noting the pattern of callosities, made white against the black skin by clusters of parasites, found on the whale's body and head. Right whales don't have teeth, but trap krill and plankton with fringed plates (baleen) that hang from the upper jaw.

The slow-moving right whale was a favorite target of whalers because, unlike other species, it remained floating on the surface after being killed. After more than half a century of legal protection, South Atlantic right whale populations are now slowly recovering.

### Killer Whale

**What:** *Ornicus orca*; in Spanish orca

**When:** June to mid-December, peak season September and October

**Where:** Península Valdés

These large dolphins, black with white underbellies, live in pods consisting of one male, a cluster of females and the young. Upon maturity, the males leave the pod to create their own. Males, which can reach more than 9m in length and weigh as much as 6000kg, live an average of 30

years, while females, substantially smaller at 7m and about 4000kg, live about 50 years, calving approximately every 10 years. The ominous dorsal fin can reach nearly 2m high.

Killer whales prey on fish, penguins, dolphins and seals, and will hunt in groups to prey upon larger whales. At Punta Norte on Península Valdés they hunt sea lions and elephant seals by almost beaching themselves and waiting for the waters to wash a few unfortunates their way. In the 1970s groups concerned with the livelihood of the sea lions requested the whales be shot, to either kill or scare them away, before they decimated the sea lion colonies. Fortunately, this reaction was short-lived and made clear the inevitability of the food chain.

### Southern Sea Lion

**What:** *Otaria flavescens*; in Spanish lobo marino

**When:** year-round

**Where:** widely distributed along Patagonia coasts

Aggressive southern sea lions feed largely on squid and the occasional penguin. No matter how tempting, don't approach them too closely for photo ops. The bull (male) has a thick neck and large head with longer hair around the neck, creating the appearance of a lion's mane. An adult male can weigh 300kg and measure 2m, while females weigh around 200kg. Bulls fight to control their harems and breed with up to 10 females per season. Females give birth once each season and are ready for mating again in less than a week. Unlike the elephant seal, pups nurse only from their mothers.

### Southern Elephant Seal

**What:** *Mirounga leonina*; in Spanish elefante marino

**When:** year-round; births and mating between September and November

**Where:** widely distributed along Patagonia coasts

Elephant seals take their common name from the male's enormous proboscis, which does indeed resemble an elephant's trunk. Bulls (males) reach nearly 7m in length and can weigh over 3500kg, but females are substantially smaller. They spend most of the year at sea, and have been observed diving to a depth of 1500m and staying submerged for over an hour in search of squid and other marine life. (The average dive depth and duration are 1000m and 23 minutes.)

Península Valdés has the only breeding colony of southern elephant seals on the South American continent. The bull comes ashore in late winter or early spring, breeding after the already pregnant females arrive and give birth. Dominant males known as 'beachmasters' control harems of up to 100 females but must constantly fight off challenges from bachelor males. Females give birth to a pup once a year, each pregnancy lasting 11 months. For 19 days after the birth the female nurses the pup, during which time she will lose close to 40% of her body weight, while the pup's increases by 300%. Pups will sometimes nurse from other females. After the 19 days, the mother may breed again.

### Commerson's Dolphin

**What:** *Cephalorhynchus commersonii*; in Spanish tonina overa

**When:** year-round; breeding season November to February

**Where:** Puerto San Julián, Playa Unión, Puerto Deseado

Outgoing and acrobatic, the Commerson's dolphin is a favorite along shallow areas of coastal Patagonia. Adults are quite small, about 1.5m in length, and brilliantly patterned in black and white with a rounded dorsal fin. Young dolphins are gray, brown and black; the brown slowly disappears and the gray fades to striking white. In small groups, they play around the sides of boats, breaching frequently and sometimes riding the bow. Commerson's dolphins eat shrimp, squid and bottom-dwelling fish. In Argentina they are illegally captured to use as crab bait.



## WELSH LEGACY

The Welsh opened the door to settling Patagonia in 1865, though the newfound freedom cost them dearly. Few had farmed before and the arid steppe showed no resemblance to their verdant homeland. After nearly starving, they survived with the help of the Tehuelche, and eventually occupied the entire lower Chubut valley, founding the towns and teahouses of Rawson, Trelew, Puerto Madryn and Gaiman.

Today about 20% of Chubut's inhabitants have Welsh blood, though it logically grows thinner with each generation, 'or pretty soon you're marrying your cousin,' jokes one descendant. What you wouldn't expect is that a recent revival of Welsh culture is dragging it back from the grave. According to Welsh historian Fernando Coronato, 'For the old principality of Wales, Patagonia meant its most daring venture.' This renewed bond means yearly British Council appointments of Welsh teachers and exchanges for Patagonian students. Welsh tourists come curious, as if time-traveling in their own culture, thanks to Patagonia's longtime isolation.

kids to sleep over and explore the museum by flashlight. The museum also sponsors interesting group tours to **Geoparque Paleontológico Bryn Gwyn** (admission AR\$8; ☎ daylight hours), in the badlands along the Río Chubut (25km from Trelew, or 8km south of Gaiman via RP 5). The three-hour guided visits are a walk through time, along a well-designed nature trail past a wealth of exposed fossils dating as far back as the Tertiary, some 40 million years ago.

## MUSEO DE ARTES VISUALES

Adjoined to the tourist office, this small visual-arts **museum** (San Martín 351; admission free; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, 2-8pm Sat & Sun) features works on loan from the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes in Buenos Aires, as well as polished relics from Welsh colonization.

## MUSEO REGIONAL PUEBLO DE LUIS

In a former railway station, this **museum** (☎ 424062; cnr Av Fontana & 9 de Julio; admission AR\$2; ☎ 7am-1pm & 3-9pm Mon-Fri) displays historical photographs, clothing and period furnishings of Welsh settlers. More explanations would be welcome. The train stopped running in 1961, but the antique steam engine and other machinery outside are worth a stop.

## Tours

Several travel agencies run excursions to Reserva Provincial Punta Tombo (around AR\$125, plus AR\$30 admission), some passing by Puerto Rawson on the way back to see toninas overas (Commerson's dolphins) when conditions are agreeable. The actual time at Punta Tombo is only about 1½ hours. Full-day trips to Península Valdés are also on

offer, but going to Puerto Madryn first is a better bet: there are more options, prices are similar and there's less driving time. Note that distances to all these sites are very long and more time is spent in transit than at the attractions; take water and snacks.

Local agencies worth checking out include Amex representative **Nievemar** (☎ 434114; www.nievemartours.com.ar in Spanish; Italia 20), which accepts traveler's checks, and **Alcamar Travel** (☎ 421448; San Martín 146).

## Festivals & Events

**Gwyl y Gianiad** On July 28 the landing of the first Welsh is celebrated by taking tea in one of the many chapels. **Eisteddfod de Chubut** (☎ 430156) A Welsh literary and musical festival, held in late October. The tradition started in 1875.

**Aniversario de la Ciudad** October 20; commemorates the city's founding in 1886.

## Sleeping

Trelew's accommodations are largely dated and geared toward the business traveler; in addition, spots fill up fast. Travelers can find greater variety in nearby Puerto Madryn.

## BUDGET

**Camping Patagonia** (☎ 02965-15-406907, 02965-15-350581; per person AR\$7) Shady and spacious, this green campground has a small convenience store, electricity and hot showers, but limited public transport. It's 7km from town on RN 7, off the road to Rawson.

## MIDRANGE

**Hotel Rivadavia** (☎ 434472; www.cpatagonia.com/rivadavia in Spanish; Rivadavia 55; s/d/tr AR\$60/80/90) Up on a hill, this small family-run hotel offers good

value, though the rooms with gauzy curtains are somewhat faded. Breakfast (AR\$6) is served in the TV-oriented lobby.

**Residencial Argentino** (☎ 436134; Moreno 93; s/d/tr AR\$60/90/110) This place has a kitsch throwback feel: rooms feature chrome chairs and fluorescent tube lamps. It is worn around the edges (particularly the bathrooms) but provides affordable value close to the bus terminal and fronts a pleasant park.

**Hotel Touring Club** (☎ 433997/98; htouring@speedy.com.ar; Av Fontana 240; d with breakfast AR\$140; ☎) Expectations are high when you climb the curved marble staircase of this historic hotel, but most of the grandeur goes into the lobby. Touring Club feels retro but furnishings are probably original. Rooms are small but adequate, with the downside of lumpy mattresses.

**City Hotel** (☎ 433951; hotelcitytrelew@speedy.com.ar; Rivadavia 254; s/d/tr with breakfast AR\$80/150/210; ☎) There is not a speck of dust about this urban hotel, though it retains all the charm of a government institution. The shuttered rooms are plain but comfortable and include TV and wi-fi. Parking is free.

**Hotel Galicia** (☎ 433802; www.hotelgalicia.com.ar in Spanish; 9 de Julio 214; s/d/tr/q AR\$120/150/175/220) A marble staircase and gold trim bring a swanky touch to this popular hotel. The wood-paneled rooms have firm mattresses, carpet and cable TV. Staff are friendly and parking is AR\$15 extra.

## TOP END

**Hotel Libertador** (☎ 420220; www.hotellibertadortw.com; Rivadavia 31; s/d/ste AR\$154/185/214; ☎ ☎) Rooms in this business hotel are comfortable, with soft decor, firm beds and ample light, but no one ever updated the fire-engine red carpet! Tubs, phones and TVs come with all rooms, but VIP ones are more spacious. Breakfast in the restaurant is buffet-style and parking is free.

## Eating

**Venezia** (25 de Mayo 21; snacks AR\$6; ☎ 7:30am-10pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm & 4-8pm Sun) This bakery and ice-cream shop tempts passersby with a window view of mousses and chocolate creations to drool over. They also make fresh *facturas* (pastries).

**El Quijote** (Belgrano 361; mains AR\$14-28) This traditional downtown *parrilla* is a bit frilly around the edges, but the meats are expertly handled and just right with a side of french fries.

**La Bodeguita** (☎ 436276; Belgrano 374; mains AR\$15-30) A popular stop for meats, pasta and seafood, this restaurant boasts attentive service and a family atmosphere.

**El Viejo Molino** (☎ 428019; Av Gales 250; mains AR\$21; ☎ closed Mon) Iron lamps and brickwork restore the romance to this 1914 flour mill, a must if you're in town. On weekends it's packed, with the main attraction, the wood-fired *parrilla*, grilling steaks and even vegetables to perfection. There's an extensive wine list and salads too.

**Miguel Angel** (Av Fontana; mains AR\$28; ☎ closed Mon) This chic eatery departs from the everyday with yummy dishes like gnocchi with wild mushrooms, and popular sushi Wednesdays, but its staples are the homemade pastas and pizzas.

## Drinking

**Touring Club** (☎ 433997/98; Av Fontana 240; snacks AR\$12; ☎ 6:30am-2am; ☎) Old lore exudes from the pores of this historic *confeitería*, from the Butch Cassidy 'Wanted' poster to the embossed tile ceiling and antique barback. Even the tuxedoed waitstaff appear to be plucked from another era. It's too bad the sandwiches are only so-so, but it's worth stopping in for coffee or beers.

**Margarita Bar** (☎ 432126; Av Fontana 230; mains AR\$28; ☎ noon-3pm & 8pm-1am) A cool nightspot with brick walls and slick white-leather booths, Margarita also dishes up surprisingly tasty food in good portions. On weekends it can stay open until 6am. Occasional live acts include tango and *rock nacional*.

**San Javier** (☎ 423474; San Martín 57) The front part offers café fare and ice cream, but Guinness and Kilkenny are served in the dark-wood watering hole out back.

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

Trelew's **airport** (TRE; ☎ 428021) is 5km north of town off RN 3. Airport tax is AR\$6.

**Aerolíneas Argentinas** (☎ 420210; 25 de Mayo 33) flies direct daily to Buenos Aires (AR\$537) and several times a week to Esquel (AR\$425), Bariloche (AR\$1334), Ushuaia (AR\$1014) and El Calafate (AR\$820).

**LADE** (☎ 435740), based at the bus terminal, flies to Comodoro Rivadavia (AR\$170) on Wednesdays and Buenos Aires (AR\$258) on Thursdays, in addition to other northern Patagonian destinations.

**BUS**

Trelew's full-service **bus terminal** (☎ 420121) is six blocks northeast of downtown.

For Gaiman (AR\$3), **28 de Julio** (☎ 432429) has 18 services a day between 7am and 11pm (reduced weekend service), with most continuing to Dolavon (AR\$5, half hour). Buses to Rawson (AR\$2.20, 15 minutes) leave every 15 minutes.

**Mar y Valle** (☎ 432429) and 28 de Julio run hourly buses to Puerto Madryn (AR\$7.50, one hour). Mar y Valle goes to Puerto Pirámides (AR\$16.50, 2½ hours) daily at 8:15am, with additional service in summer. **El Nandú** (☎ 427499) goes to Camarones (AR\$20, three hours) at 8am Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

Long-distance bus companies include **El Condor** (☎ 431675), **Que Bus** (☎ 422760), **Andesmar** (☎ 433535), **TAC** (☎ 431452), **TUS** (☎ 421343) and **Don Otto** (☎ 429496).

Of several departures daily for Buenos Aires, Don Otto has the most comfortable and most direct service. Only Don Otto goes to Mar del Plata, while TAC goes to La Plata. TAC and Andesmar service the most towns. For Comodoro Rivadavia there are a few daily departures with TAC, Don Otto or Andesmar, all of which also continue on to San Julián and Río Gallegos.

Destination	Cost (AR\$)	Duration (hr)
Bahía Blanca	97-116	12
Bariloche	116-150	13
Buenos Aires	188-214	18-21
Caleta Olivia	62-77	6
Comodoro Rivadavia	62-82	5-6
Córdoba	166-216	19
Esquel	80-105	8-9
La Plata	188-195	19
Mar del Plata	181-216	17-21
Mendoza	207-258	24
Neuquén	99-124	10
Puerto Madryn	7.50	1
Río Gallegos	155-186	14-17
Viedma	69-81	8

**Getting Around**

From the airport, taxis charge AR\$15 to downtown, AR\$40 to Gaiman and AR\$110 to Puerto Madryn. Car-rental agencies at the airport include **Avis** (☎ 434634) and **Localiza** (☎ 430070).

**AROUND TRELEW**

**Rawson**, 17km east of Trelew, is Chubut's provincial capital, but nearby **Playa Unión**, the region's principal playground, has the capi-

tal attraction: toninas overas (Commerson's dolphins; see p441). Playa Unión is a long stretch of white-sand beach with blocks of summer homes. Dolphin tours (AR\$70, 1½ hours) depart **Puerto Rawson** from April to December. For reservations, contact **Toninas Adventure** (☎ 02965-15-666542).

Empresas Rawson and 28 de Julio buses depart from Trelew for Rawson (AR\$2.20) frequently from Monday to Friday and every 20 to 30 minutes on weekends. Get off at Rawson's plaza or bus terminal and hop on a green 'Bahía' bus, which heads to Puerto Rawson before turning around.

**GAIMAN**

☎ 02965 / pop 5753

Cream pie, dainty tea cakes, *torta negra* (a rich, dense fruit cake) and a hot pot of black tea – most visitors take an oral dose of culture when visiting this quintessential Welsh river-valley village. Today, about a third of the residents claim Welsh ancestry and teahouses persist in their afternoon tradition, even as their overselling sometimes rubs the charm thin. Gaiman's homey digs provide great value for lodgers, but the town offers little in the way of diversion beyond quiet strolls past stone houses with rose gardens after a filling teahouse visit.

The town's name, meaning Stony Point or Arrow Point, originated from the Tehuelche who once wintered in this valley. After the Welsh constructed their first house in 1874, the two groups peacefully coexisted for a time. Later immigrant groups of criollos, Germans and Anglos joined the Welsh and continued cultivation of fruit, vegetables and grains in the lower Río Chubut valley.

**Orientation & Information**

Gaiman is 17km west of Trelew via RN 25. The town's touristy center is little more than a crisscross of streets snuggled between the barren hills and Río Chubut. Av Eugenio Tello is the main road, connecting the main town entrance to leafy Plaza Roca. Most of the teahouses and historic sites are within four blocks of the plaza. Across the river are fast-growing residential and industrial areas.

There's one ATM on the plaza at Banco del Chubut but it does not always work, so bring cash. *Locutorios* and internet can be found along the main drag.

**Post office** (cnr Evans & Yrigoyen) Just north of the river bridge.

**Tourist office** (Casa de Informes; ☎ 491571; www.gaiman.gov.ar in Spanish; cnr Rivadavia & Belgrano; ☎ 9am-9pm Mon-Sat, 2-8pm Sun) Ask here for a map and guided tours of historic houses.

**Sights**

Gaiman is ideal for an informal walking tour, past homes with ivy trellises and drooping, oversized roses. Architecturally distinctive churches and chapels dot the town. **Primera Casa** (cnr Av Eugenio Tello & Evans; admission AR\$2; ☎ by request at tourist office) is the first house, built in 1874 by David Roberts. Dating from 1906, the **Colegio Camwy** (cnr MD Jones & Rivadavia) is considered the first secondary school in Patagonia.

The old railway station houses the **Museo Histórico Regional Gales** (☎ 491007; cnr Sarmiento & 28 de Julio; admission AR\$2; ☎ 3-7pm Tue-Sun), a fine small museum holding the belongings and photographs of town pioneers.

The **Museo Antropológico** (cnr Bouchard & Jones; admission free; ☎ by request at tourist office) offers humble homage to the indigenous cultures and history. Nearby is the 300m **Túnel del Ferrocarril**, a brick tunnel through which the first trains to Dolavon passed in 1914.

Don't miss **Parque El Desafío** (www.eldesafiogaiman.com.ar in Spanish; Av Brown 52; admission AR\$10, children under 10 free; ☎ dawn-dusk), the perfect remedy to long-distance travel fatigue. Its octogenarian owner Joaquín Alonso, the 'Dali of Recycling,' fashioned some 80,000 bottles, cans and soda containers into whimsical folk art with some 30,000 hours of work. Though he created the park to entertain his grandchildren, adults can appreciate it just as well. Plaques (some translated into English) with folk sayings and quotes from Seneca and Plato offer wit and reflection for all amid this symphony of junk. As one proclaims, '*Si quieres vivir mejor, mezcla a tu sensatez unos gramos de locura*' ('If you want to live better, mix up your sensibility with a few grams of craziness'). The park gained Guinness World Record status in 1998 as Earth's largest 'recycled' park. Visitors can't help but leave El Desafío (translated as 'the achievement') without a smile, a whimsical notion or whiff of inspiration, which is its own testament. It is located at the western entrance to town.

**Sleeping**

**Camping Bomberos Voluntarios** (☎ 491117; cnr Av Yrigoyen & Moreno; per person AR\$5, children under 12 free) The volunteer firefighters put together this

agreeable campground with hot-water showers and fire pits.

**Unelem** (☎ 491663; www.unelem.com in Spanish; cnr Av Eugenio Tello & 9 de Julio; s/d AR\$80/98) Downplaying its original elegance, this old building offers four patterned rooms that are enormous and airy, with room for a table and dresser. There is a cheap *comedor* (restaurant) inside. It sits in front of the YPE.

**Dyffryn Gwyrd** (☎ 491777; www.dwhosteria.com.ar in Spanish; Av Eugenio Tello 103; s/d/tr AR\$80/100/120) This canary-yellow home creates an inviting atmosphere of bright and simple rooms with carpet, fans and throw pillows. The bathrooms are dated but spotless and there's a quiet bar and TV area.

**Hosteria Gwesty Tywi** (☎ 491292; www.advance.com.ar/usuarios/gwestytwi; Chacra 202; s/d/tr/q with breakfast AR\$90/110/130/150; ☎) Diego and Brenda run this wonderful Welsh B&B with large gardens and snug, frilly rooms. Breakfast includes a selection of jams, cold meats and bread. They are glad to help with travel planning and occasionally fire up the barbecue to the delight of guests.

**El Cuenco** (☎ 02965-15-505963; www.hostalelcuenco.com.ar in Spanish; Fontana 300; 4-person cabin AR\$150) Previously inhabited by gnomes, this sprightly wooden A-frame cabin offers a welcome retreat in the middle of town. It's located across the bridge from the plaza on a quiet residential street.

**Eating**

*Tarten afal, tarten gwstard, cacen ffrwythau, spwnj jam and bara brith* and a bottomless pot of tea – hungry yet? Afternoon tea is taken as a sacrament in Gaiman – though busloads of tourists get dumprucked in teahouses without warning. The best bet is to look for places without buses in front, or wait for their departure. Whatever you do, eat a light lunch, or simply skip it. Tea services usually run from 2pm to 7pm.

**Breuddwyd** (☎ 491133; Yrigoyen 320; snacks AR\$8, tea AR\$25) A modern café whose best feature is the flower garden out back, brimming with blooms and a fountain. Ask about rooms for rent upstairs.

**Plasy Coed** (☎ 02965-15-629343; www.plasycoed.com.ar; MD Jones 123; tea AR\$25) Run by the original owner's great-granddaughter in a gorgeous brick mansion, Plasy Coed pleases the palette and senses, with friendly service, fresh cakes and serious crochet cozies for that steaming-hot pot.

**La Vieja Cuadra** (☎ 02965-15-682352; cnr Av Eugenio Tello & MD Jones; mains AR\$20-30; ☎ 8:30pm-midnight Tue-Sat, 12:30-3pm Sun) Considered Gaiman's best restaurant, it serves homemade pastas and well-seasoned meat dishes that are consistently good. Service is attentive.

**Ty Nain** (☎ 491126; Yrigoyen 283; tea AR\$30; ☎ closed May) With the endorsements of the *Washington Post* and *Los Angeles Times* plastered on the front lawn, who needs our two cents? Inside an ivy-clad 1890 home, Ty Nain persists as one of the country's most traditional tea-houses. The adjoining museum has some interesting Welsh artifacts.

**Ty Cymraeg** (☎ 491010; Matthews 74; tea AR\$30) Teatime in this riverside house includes sumptuous pies and jams. Breakfast is available with reservations.

**El Ángel** (☎ 491460; Rivadavia 241; mains AR\$36) Combining sweet and savory in tasty concoctions, stylish Ángel is a favorite for romantic tête-à-têtes. Hours can be very sporadic so reserve ahead.

## Getting There & Away

During the week, 28 de Julio buses depart for Trelew (AR\$3) frequently from Plaza Roca, from 7am to 11pm; weekend services are fewer. Most buses to Dolavon (AR\$3) use the highway, but some take the much longer gravel 'valley' route. *Remise* (taxi) service is cheaper in Gaiman than in Trelew; the trip to Trelew costs AR\$75 for up to four passengers.

## AROUND GAIMAN

To experience an authentic historic Welsh agricultural town, head to the distinctly non-touristy **Dolavon** (population 2500), 19km west of Gaiman via paved RN 25. Welsh for 'river meadow,' the town offers pastoral appeal, with wooden waterwheels lining the irrigation canal, framed by rows of swaying poplars. The historic center is full of brick buildings, including the 1880 **Molino Harinero** (☎ 02965-492290; romanogi@infovia.com.ar; Maipú 61; guided tour per person AR\$10) with still-functioning flour mill machinery. It also has a café-restaurant (meals AR\$30) serving handmade breads and pastas with local wines and cheeses. Call owner Romano Giallatini for opening hours.

## RESERVA PROVINCIAL PUNTA TOMBO

Continental South America's largest penguin nesting ground, **Punta Tombo** (admission AR\$30; ☎ dawn-dusk Aug-Apr) has a colony of more than

half a million Magellanic penguins and attracts many other birds, most notably king and rock cormorants, giant petrels, kelp gulls, flightless steamer ducks and black oystercatchers.

Trelew-based agencies run daylong tours (around AR\$125, not including entrance fee), but may cancel if bad weather makes the unpaved roads impassable. If possible, come in the early morning to beat the crowds. Most nesting areas in the 200-hectare reserve are fenced off: respect the limits and remember that penguins can inflict serious bites.

There's a bar and *confitería* on-site, but it's best to bring a picnic lunch.

Punta Tombo is 110km south of Trelew (180km south of Puerto Madryn) via well-maintained gravel RP 1 and a short south-east lateral. Motorists can proceed south to Camarones via scenic but desolate Cabo Raso.

## CAMARONES

☎ 0297 / pop 1300

In the stiff competition for Patagonia's sleepiest coastal village, Camarones takes home gold. Don't diss its languorous state: if you've ever needed to run away, this is one good option. Its empty beaches are conducive to strolling and the sociable townsfolk are masters in the art of shooting the breeze. It is also the closest hub to the lesser-known Cabo Dos Bahías nature reserve, where you can visit 25,000 penguin couples and their fuzzy chicks.

Spanish explorer Don Simón de Alcazaba y Sotomayor anchored here in 1545, proclaiming it part of his attempted Provincia de Nueva León. When the wool industry took off, Camarones became the area's main port for wool and sheepskins. The high quality of local wool didn't go unnoticed by justice of the peace Don Mario Tomás Perón, who operated the area's largest *estancia*, Porvenir, on which his son (and future president) Juanito would romp about. The town flourished as a port, but after Comodoro Rivadavia finished its massive port, Camarones was all but deserted.

The very helpful oceanfront **tourist office** (☎ 496-3040; Tomas Espora s/n) offers maps, good tips on scenic outings and lodging information. Contact **Jorge Kriegel** (☎ 496-3056) at Camping Municipal for fishing excursions and outings to see dolphins and nearby islands. Every February, Camarones hits its stride with the **Fiesta Nacional del Salmón**, a weekend of deep-sea fishing competitions

### DO IT YOURSELF: MI CAMARONES

- Look for the historic Perón family home (or enjoy chatting up locals while doing so)
- Explore the sandy beaches and rocky cliffs north of town
- Gaze out at the great view where Cabo Dos Bahías splits two bays

featuring a free Sunday seafood lunch for all and the crowning of Miss Salmoncito.

Locals anticipate the inauguration of RN 1 in 2009, which will mean direct buses from Comodoro Rivadavia, and probably a good deal more tourism. If you hurry, you can say you knew Camarones way back when.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Camping Camarones** (San Martín; per person/vehicle AR\$3/5) At the waterfront port, this peaceful campground offers shade to a few campers. Hot showers and electricity are other perks.

**El Viejo Torino** (☎ 496-3003; cnr Av Costanera & Brown; r per person AR\$55) This attractive house down by the water is sometimes let out to long-term workers, but provides good-value rooms and meals on occasion.

**Hotel Indalo Inn** (☎ 496-3004; www.indaloinn.com.ar; cnr Sarmiento & Roca; s/d AR\$100/130) Remodeled rooms are a bit of a squeeze but feature good bedding and snug comforts. The showers demonstrate gale force and breakfast includes *café con leche* (coffee with milk). Internet is AR\$5 per hour for computer use or wi-fi. The attached restaurant (mains AR\$30) is just OK for the price.

Pick up groceries at **Mercado Mica** (cnr Roca & Sarmiento).

## Getting There & Away

At a gas-station junction 180km south of Trelew, RP 30 splits off from RN 3 and heads 72km east to Camarones. El Nándú buses go to Trelew (AR\$20, three hours) on Monday, Wednesday and Friday at 4pm. For transport to Cabo Dos Bahías, chat with Don Roberto at Hotel Indalo Inn.

## CABO DOS BAHÍAS

Thirty rough kilometers southeast of Camarones, the isolated **Cabo Dos Bahías** (admission AR\$20; ☎ year-round) rookery attracts far

fewer visitors than Punta Tombo, making it an excellent alternative. You'll be rewarded with orcas, a huge colony of nesting penguins in spring and summer, whales in winter and a large concentration of guanacos and rheas. Seabirds, sea lions, foxes and fur seals are year-round residents.

Inside the reserve, the friendly tourist complex **Caleta Sara** (☎ 0297-447-1118, 0297-15-422-2270; www.tramotours.com.ar in Spanish; camping per person AR\$15, dm AR\$35; ☎ Sep-Feb) offers dorm beds with sheets and blankets in trailers as well as camping. Cafeteria fare depends on the catch of the day. Car transfers can be arranged from the crossroads with RN 3 (AR\$150) or Camarones (AR\$80).

You can pitch a tent for free at Cabo Dos Bahías Club Náutico or on any of the beaches en route from Camarones.

## COMODORO RIVADAVIA

☎ 0297 / pop 140,682

Surrounded by dry hills of drilling rigs, oil tanks and wind-energy farms, tourism in the dusty port of Comodoro (as it's commonly known) usually means little more than a bus transfer. What this modern, hardworking city does provide is a gateway to nearby attractions with decent services. It sits at the eastern end of the Corredor Bioceánico highway that leads to Coyhaique, Chile.

Founded in 1901, Comodoro was once a transport hub linking ranches in nearby Sarmiento. In 1907 the town struck it rich when workers drilling for water struck oil instead. With the country's first major gusher, Comodoro became a state pet, gaining a large port, airport and paved roads. Today it is a powerhouse in the now-privatized oil industry. Although the recession hit hard in 2001, this boomtown rebounded with a flashy casino, elegant shops and hot rods on the streets.

Commerce centers on the principal streets Av San Martín and Av Rivadavia. Av San Martín between Mitre and Belgrano has upscale boutiques and shops unknown to most of Patagonia. A climb up 212m to the mirador atop Cerro Chenque, smack dab in the middle of the city, offers views to Golfo San Jorge.

## Information

*Locutorios* abound around downtown.

**ACA** (Automóvil Club Argentino; ☎ 446-0876; cnr Dorrego & Alvear) Maps and road info.



**Banco de la Nación** (cnr Av San Martín & Güemes) Most of Comodoro's banks and ATMs, including this one, are along Av San Martín or Av Rivadavia.

**Centro Internet Comodoro** (Av San Martín 536) Stays open late.

**Hospital Regional** (☎ 444-2287; Av Hipólito Yrigoyen 950)

**Laverap** (Av Rivadavia 287) Centrally located laundry.

**Post office** (cnr Av San Martín & Moreno)

**Thaler Cambio** (Mitre 943) Changes traveler's checks.

**Tourist office** (☎ 446-2376; www.comodoro.gov.ar/turismo in Spanish; Av Rivadavia 430; ☎ 8am-3pm Mon-Fri) Friendly, well stocked and well organized. A desk at the bus terminal is open 8am to 9pm.

## Sights

### MUSEO NACIONAL DEL PETRÓLEO

Intransigent petroleum fans head to **Museo Nacional del Petróleo** (☎ 455-9558; admission AR\$5; ☎ 9am-6pm Tue-Fri, 2-6pm Sat & Sun), for an insider look at the social and historical aspects of petroleum development. Don't expect balanced treatment of oil issues – the museum was built by the former state oil agency YPF (it is now managed by the Universidad Nacional de Patagonia). While its historical photos are

interesting, the detailed models of tankers, refineries and the entire zone of exploitation are best left to the die-hard. Guided tours are available.

The museum is in the suburb of General Mosconi, 3km north of downtown. Take a *remise* from downtown (AR\$9), or bus 7 'Laprida' or 8 'Palazzo' (AR\$1.50, 10 minutes); get off at La Anónima supermarket.

### MUSEO REGIONAL PATAGÓNICO

Decaying natural-history specimens at this **museum** (☎ 477-7101; cnr Av Rivadavia & Chacabuco; admission free; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 3-7pm Sat & Sun) nearly overshadow the small yet entertaining archaeological and historical items, including well-crafted pottery, spear points and materials on early South African Boer immigrants.

## Tours

Several agencies arrange trips to Bosque Petrificado Sarmiento (p453) and Cueva de las Manos (p480).

**Ruta 40** (☎ 446-5337; www.ruta-40.com) organizes well-informed and personalized 4WD trips on RN 40 and in other parts of Patagonia. It's run

by Mónica Jung and Pedro Mangini, a dynamic duo who speak English, German and Italian.

The urban train tour **Circuito Ferroportuario** (admission free) takes visitors on a circuit from the tourist office to visit containers, warehouses, historical installations and workshops on the port.

## Sleeping

Catering mainly to business travelers and long-term laborers, lodging here fits two categories: the ritzy and the run-down (and often full). Try reserving your spot well in advance.

## BUDGET

**Camping Municipal** (☎ 445-2918; Rada Tilly; www.rada.tilly.com.ar/turismo-camping.html in Spanish; per person AR\$5) At the windy beach resort of Rada Tilly, 15km south of Comodoro, this campground has sites with windbreaking shrubs. The wide beach is one of Patagonia's longest and there's a sea lion colony near the south end below Punta del Marqués. Frequent buses leave from Comodoro's bus terminal.

**Hospedaje Belgrano** (☎ 447-8439; Belgrano 546; s with/without bathroom AR\$90/45) Run by a stern matron, this cavernous, high-ceiling classic offers basic, old-fashioned rooms, nice hallways and the tweeting of parakeets.

## MIDRANGE

**Hostería Rúa Marina** (☎ 446-8777; Belgrano 738; s/d/tr/q with breakfast AR\$60/126/154/180) Reminiscent of an old YMCA, Rúa Marina has small but OK rooms that are on the dark side. The best options are rooms 18, 19 and 20, with outside windows.

**Hospedaje Cari-Hue** (☎ 447-2946; Belgrano 563; s/d without bathroom AR\$80/120, with bathroom AR\$160/180) Tidy rooms flank an indoor patio that's strewn with plants and garden gnomes. It's central, albeit noisy.

**Hotel Victoria** (☎ 446-0725; Belgrano 585; s/d/tr AR\$140/170/210) The friendliest hotel on the block. Soothing, good-sized rooms have firm twin beds, desks and cable TV.

**Residencial Comodoro** (☎ 446-2582; tilsamen dieta55@hotmail.com; España 919; s/d/tr/q with breakfast AR\$130/180/195/240) A tidy and serviceable old hotel. Rooms have high ceilings and tile floors but clear tape mends the armchairs.

## TOP END

**Comodoro Hotel** (☎ 447-2300; www.comodorohotel.com.ar in Spanish; 9 de Julio 770; s/d standard AR\$191/218, superior

AR\$231/270; ☎ ) Once the only game in town, this high-rise could use updating. Remodeled superior rooms offer larger bathrooms, while standard rooms remain a little drab for their price tag. Rates include a buffet breakfast and internet access.

**Austral Plaza Hotel** (☎ 447-2200; www.australhotel.com.ar in Spanish; Moreno 725; s/d standard AR\$200/225, superior AR\$410/435; ☎ ) Enter the labyrinth of this business hotel and convention center and you will find boxy standard rooms. Slicker suites await in the newer Plaza wing, with attentive staff and a big breakfast buffet adding to the sparkle. Its restaurant, Tunet, does gourmet seafood impeccably and the desserts are award-winning. Pack your polo shirt – guests also have access to a golf and tennis club.

**Lucania Palazzo Hotel** (☎ 449-9300; www.lucania-palazzo.com in Spanish; Moreno 676; s/d/st AR\$420/488/493; ☎ ) Comodoro's answer to the Trump Towers, the sparkling Palazzo offers ocean views from every room and tasteful modern decor, although ventilation could be better. There are six presidential suites (just in case OPEC comes to town), a business center and a haute Mediterranean seafood restaurant.

## Eating

Travelers will find more in the way of restaurant selections than hotels – the oil boom has bankrolled a taste for fine dining. You can find the free *Sabores del Sur* restaurant directory in some hotels.

**Chocolates** (Av San Martín 231; cones AR\$8) Ice-cream junkies can appreciate this parlor's selection of velvety chocolate and rich *dulce de leche* flavors.

**Patio de Comidas** (cnr Güemes & Av San Martín; meals AR\$9) Meet some oil workers while you dine cheap and cafeteria-style, with burgers made to order. It's next to the grocery store.

**Malaespina** (☎ 446-0667; 9 de Julio 859; mains AR\$15-25; ☎ 10am-late Mon-Sat, 7pm-late Sun; ☎ ) A chic restaurant-bar catering to playful palates, Malaespina is lustrous and low-lit with ample lounge space in the back. A wide selection of salads, pizza and gourmet sandwiches fills the menu. Try the Hendrix, with *jamon crudo* (cured ham), avocado and cheese on wheat bread.

**La Barra** (Av San Martín 686; mains AR\$15-25) This modern café is a popular stop for an after-work *café con leche*. At mealtimes you'll find a good selection of salads, fancy burgers and meats, along with plenty of cocktails.

**Los Tres Chinos** (☎ 444-1168; Av Rivadavia 341; buffet AR\$16) Hook up with this enormous *tenedor libre* (all-you-can-eat restaurant) for vegetarian fare as well as grilled meats. Drinks can be expensive.

**Pizzería Giulietta** (☎ 446-1201; Belgrano 851; mains AR\$21) The place for pizzas, Giulietta also makes noteworthy spinach pasta and gnocchi, offered with your choice of several cream- or tomato-based sauces.

**La Tradición** (☎ 446-5800; Mitre 675; mains AR\$28-45; ☎ closed Sun) This elegant *parrilla* grills excellent meats in a setting of white linens and oil paintings (literally, since their subjects are oil rigs!). The chicken in red-wine sauce has subtle, rich flavor. Save room for dessert.

## Drinking & Entertainment

**Barile Express** (Av San Martín 514; snacks AR\$8) Grab a newspaper and take your jolt of caffeine alongside the other patrons downing warm *medialunas*. The meringue pies look tempting.

**Café del Sol** (☎ 440-0034; Av San Martín 502; breakfast & snacks AR\$6-15) This hip café offers mellow nightlife and also serves breakfast.

**Molly Malone** (☎ 447-8333; Av San Martín 292; mains AR\$9-21) Run by the Golden Oldies rugby club, this funky little resto-pub is a pleasant stop for breakfast, set lunch or an evening quilmes.

**La Nueva Cabaña** (9 de Julio 821; ☎ 8pm-6am Tue-Thu, 10pm-6am Fri & Sat) This rustic, bare-bones pub and dance spot attracts a young crowd for *musica electronica*, rock, folk and pop.

**Cine Teatro Español** (☎ 447-7700; www.cinecr.com.ar in Spanish; Av San Martín 668; admission AR\$12) Offers a wide selection of Hollywood flicks.

## Getting There & Away

The Corredor Bioceánico – RN 26, RP 20 and RP 55 – is a straight highway link to Coyhaique, Chile, and its Pacific port, Puerto Chacabuco. Developers are promoting this commercial transport route as an alternative to the Panama Canal, since the pass is open year-round and it is the continent's shortest distance between ports on both oceans. Paved RN 26, RP 20 and RN 40 lead to Esquel and Bariloche.

### AIR

**Aeropuerto General Mosconi** (CRD; ☎ 454-8190) is 9km north of town. Airport tax is AR\$6.

**Aerolíneas Argentinas** (☎ 444-0050; Av Rivadavia 156) flies a couple of times daily to Buenos Aires (AR\$358) and a couple of times a week to Neuquén (AR\$1209).

Comodoro is the hub for **LADE** (☎ 447-0585; Av Rivadavia 360), which wings it at least once a week to Bariloche (AR\$209), El Calafate (AR\$202), Esquel (AR\$183), Río Gallegos (AR\$210), Trelew (AR\$179), Ushuaia (AR\$286), Viedma (AR\$192) and Buenos Aires (AR\$296) and points in between. Schedules and routes change as often as the winds.

### BUS

The chaotic **bus terminal** (☎ 446-7305; Pellegrini 730) receives all buses plying RN 3. Stop at the helpful tourist desk for maps and travel assistance.

Most bus schedules are divided into north-bound and southbound departures. **Andesmar** (☎ 446-8894) departs five times daily (between 1:15am and 3pm) for points north including Trelew, Rawson, Puerto Madryn and San Antonio Oeste, then heads inland toward Córdoba. **TAC** (☎ 444-3376) follows the same route north through Patagonia, leaving at 6:20am, 7:20am and 2pm, but continues to Bahía Blanca, La Plata and Buenos Aires. For points south, TAC departs at 9:30pm for Caleta Olivia, Puerto San Julián and Río Gallegos.

**Etap** (☎ 447-4841) runs to Sarmiento four times daily (8:30am, 1pm, 6pm and 7pm), to Esquel at 9:30pm, to Río Mayo once daily, to Coyhaique on Wednesdays and Saturdays at 8am, and to Río Senguer four times weekly.

For Los Antiguos and connections to Chile Chico, via the town of Perito Moreno, **La Unión** (☎ 446-2822) has services at 5:30am and 4:45pm. **Marga** (☎ 447-0564) goes to Los Antiguos at 8pm. Marga also has a new service to El Calafate at 8pm daily. For other Chilean destinations, **Turibus** (☎ 446-0058) goes to Coyhaique Wednesday and Saturday at 8am.

Destination	Cost (AR\$)	Duration (hr)
Bahía Blanca	150-208	15
Bariloche	92-128	14
Buenos Aires	236-320	24
Caleta Olivia	14	1
Esquel	60-85	8
El Calafate	110	8
Los Antiguos	58	6
Puerto Deseado	44	4-5
Puerto Madryn	59-88	6-8
Río Gallegos	100-127	9-11
Trelew	49-75	5-6
Viedma	121-144	10-13

## Getting Around

Bus 8 'Directo Palazzo' (AR\$1.50) goes directly to the airport from outside the downtown bus terminal.

Expreso Rada Tilly links Comodoro's bus terminal to the nearby beach resort (AR\$2) every 20 minutes on weekdays and every 30 minutes on weekends.

Rental cars are available from **Avis** (☎ 454-8483; at airport) and **Localiza** (☎ 446-3526; Av Rivadavia 535). **Dubrovnik** (☎ 444-1844; www.rentacardubrovnik.com; Moreno 941) rents 4WD vehicles.

## SARMIENTO

☎ 0297 / pop 10,000

Sarmiento is a sleepy, picturesque outpost of berry and cherry plantations, where half the roads are gravel and cars dodge the dogs napping in the middle of them. Once Tehuelche territory, Argentina's southernmost irrigated town has been an agricultural center since its founding in 1897. These days it is also an oil hub surrounded by derricks, a reality most farmers prefer to ignore. For the visitor, it is the gateway to the petrified forests, 30km southeast, and a tranquil spot for the road-weary to rejuvenate. It sits between Lago Musters and Lago Colhué Huapi. As Comodoro's water source, Colhué Huapi has become a puddle of its former self and its compromised ecosystem is of serious concern to ecologists.

The eager **tourist office** (☎ 489-8220; turismo@coopsar.com.ar; cnr Infantería 25 & Pietrobelli; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Fri, 11am-5pm Sat & Sun) is helpful and provides maps of the town and region. Tourist agency **Santa Teresita** (☎ 489-3238; cnr Roca & Uruguay) makes excursions (AR\$70) to see rock art at Alero de los Manos, 55km from Sarmiento. **Cabaña del Futuro** (☎ 489-3336) raises quarter horses and runs horseback-riding trips (AR\$15 per hour) in summer.

Facing the plaza, the **Museo Regional Desiderio Torres** (Coronel 355; admission free; ☎ 10am-1pm & 5-8pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun) offers interesting archaeological and paleontology displays, as well as indigenous artifacts with an emphasis on weaving. Just before the entrance to town on the way to the petrified forest, **Granja San José** (☎ 489-3733; tours AR\$6) is a hydroponics farm selling exquisite jams.

Anglers can while away their time on **Lago Musters**, a 60m-deep, sandy-bottom lake with good year-round fishing for trout, perch and silverside. Licenses (AR\$40) are available at the tourist office.

Comfortable campsites can be found at **Camping Río Senguer** (☎ 489-8482; per tent/car/person AR\$5/2/3), located 1km from the center on RP 24. In town, find the mint-green facade of the well-scrubbed **Hotel Ismar** (☎ 489-3293; Patagonia 248; s/d/t AR\$60/90/110) for narrow motel rooms with linoleum floors.

Working cherry farm **Chacra Labrador** (☎ 489-3329, 0297-15-509-3537; www.hosterialabrador.com.ar; d AR\$180) is a charming 1930s homestead offering bed and breakfast. Rooms are few but luxuriant, with big cozy beds, antique furniture, pots of tea and crackling fires. Attentive owners Annelies and Nicolás speak Dutch and English, provide meals on request and organize excursions to nearby attractions. Reserve in advance. If you're driving, it's 10km west of Sarmiento (past the turnoff for town if you're coming from Comodoro), 1km before the Río Senguer bridge. Otherwise call for pickup from town.

Sarmiento is 148km west of Comodoro along RN 26 and RP 20. Etab buses run daily to Comodoro Rivadavia (AR\$15, two hours) at 8am, 1pm, 7pm and 10pm. Buses to Río Mayo (AR\$26, 1½ hours) go at 9:30pm daily.

## BOSQUE PETRIFICADO SARMIENTO

Fallen giants scattered in a pale sandstone landscape, this **petrified forest** (admission AR\$20; ☎ dawn-dusk), 30km southeast of Sarmiento, are a curious sight to explore. From the visitor center, a trail leads through ethereal grounds with the appearance of a lumberyard gone mad: 'wood' chips cover the ground and huge petrified logs, up to 100m in length and 1m wide, are scattered about. Unlike the petrified forest in Santa Cruz, these trunks were scattered here by strong river currents, which brought the trees from the mountainous regions about 65 million years ago. The most impressive area of the park has a handful of large trunks set against the red and orange striated bluffs. For travelers, this area is much more accessible than the Monumento Natural Bosques Petrificados further south.

Tour buses usually leave by 5pm. Try to stay through sunset, when the striped bluffs of Cerro Abigarrado and the multihued hills turn brilliantly vivid. Rangers guide tours and, if they are suspicious, will ask you to empty your pockets as you leave to expose any stolen pieces. A 'box of shame' shows what some have tried to sneak out. Ask at the tourist office in Sarmiento for *remise* rates for the 1½-hour roundtrip.



## CALETA OLIVIA

☎ 0297 / pop 37,000

Slightly seedy but nevertheless authentic, Caleta Olivia earns its living refining oil and processing fish. High winds plague the port, but are preferable to its sporadic dust storms. Located south of Comodoro on costal RN 3, Caleta Olivia is, however, a convenient place to change buses to more inspiring locales, such as the petrified forests, Puerto Deseado or Los Antiguos.

The port was built in 1901 as part of a plan to run the telegraph along the coast, and was named after the only woman on board that first ship to land here. Discovery of oil in 1944 turned the face of industry from wool and sheep transport to petroleum, as evidenced by the eerie 10m-high Monumento al Obrero Petrolero that lords over the downtown traffic circle. Colloquially called 'El Gorosito,' the muscular oil worker looks north, symbolizing the link between this area's industry and Argentina's oil-poor northern reaches.

## Orientation

Entering town from the north, RN 3 becomes Av Jorge Newbery, then Av San Martín (the main thoroughfare), continuing after the traffic circle along southeast diagonal Av Eva Perón. The southwest diagonal Av Independencia, the center of teenage cruising, becomes RP 12. Most streets run diagonal to San Martín, except in the northeast quadrant. The port and pebbly beach are four blocks east of the traffic circle.

## Information

Banks along San Martín have ATMs but don't change traveler's checks. *Locutorios* and internet cafés also line San Martín.

**Post office** (cfr 25 de Mayo & Yrigoyen)

**Tourist office** (☎ 485-0988; caletaolivia@santacruz.gov.ar; cfr San Martín & Güemes; ☎ 7am-9pm) Enthusiastic office near the monument, with a map of the town.

## SLEEP SPOT SHORTAGES

Travelers should carefully coordinate their overnight stops south on RN 3. Due to a petroleum industry boom, housing shortages in Caleta Olivia and Comodoro Rivadavia mean that many lodgings are booked out to seasonal workers. Make your reservations well in advance or coordinate your arrival with the departure of the next bus out.

## Sleeping & Eating

A housing shortage means oil workers are filling up the budget hotels and travelers may have a tough time finding a space. Rates are steep for what's on offer, and breakfast is usually extra. Av Independencia has lots of bars, cafés and ice-cream shops.

**Camping Municipal** (☎ 485-0999, ext 476; cfr Brown & Guttero; per person/car AR\$4/6) In an exposed gravel lot near the busy beach, the campground lacks privacy but has 24-hour security, hot showers and barbecue pits.

**Posada Don David** (☎ 857-7661; Yrigoyen 2385; d with/without bathroom AR\$100/90) Fronted by a lively café filled with male drinkers, these basic rooms line a tight corridor. While the bathrooms need work, this posada (inn) is at least clean. The casual eatery in front serves good grilled food and pastas (AR\$15; closed Sunday).

**Residencial Las Vegas** (☎ 485-1177; Yrigoyen 2094; d/tr/q AR\$120/150/200) This friendly basic lodging fills up with oil workers frequently. Ceilings are high and the back rooms quiet, but there's little ventilation.

**Hotel Robert** (☎ 485-1452; hrobert@mcollivia.com.ar; San Martín 2151; s/d/tr standard AR\$137/157/167, superior AR\$173/193/208) Considered the best lodging in town, the Robert put all its glitz into the mirrored marble lobby, leaving little cheer for the rooms. Standard rooms are cramped, with peeling wallpaper. The desk staff is gracious and there's a 10% cash discount.

**Hotel Capri** (☎ 485-1132; Hernández 1145; s/d AR\$150/200) For the better half of a century, the fun-loving owners have offered basic rooms (upstairs are best) off a central hallway.

**Buonna Pizza** (☎ 485-5500; Independencia 52; pizzas AR\$21) This family-friendly pizzeria provides an upbeat setting for pizza and empanadas, and it's less smoky than its nearby counterparts.

**El Puerto** (☎ 485-1313; Independencia 1060; mains AR\$35) Crisp linens and elegant seafood platters are the order of the day. To get today's catch, ask waiters '¿Que es lo más fresco?' If you are up for a spendy power lunch, it's the best bet in town.

## Getting There & Away

The **bus terminal** (cfr Bequín & Tierra del Fuego) is 3km northwest of downtown (AR\$4 by *remise*). The main north-south carriers leave for Comodoro Rivadavia (AR\$14, one hour) hourly from 7am to 11pm, with fewer services on Sunday, and for Río Gallegos (AR\$90, seven to 10 hours) four times daily between

8:30pm and 2am, passing Puerto San Julián. **Sportsman** (☎ 485-1287) and **La Unión** (☎ 485-1134) serve Puerto Deseado (AR\$36, 3½ hours), Perito Moreno (AR\$48, four hours) and Los Antiguos (AR\$59, five hours) in the early morning and late afternoon.

## PUERTO DESEADO

☎ 0297 / pop 12,000

Some 125km southeast of the RN 3 junction, RN 281 weaves through valleys of rippling pink rock, past guanacos in tufted grassland, to end at the serene and attractive deep-sea fishing town of Puerto Deseado. While the town is ripe for revitalization it is also apparent that change takes a glacial pace here: witness the vintage trucks rusting on the streets like beached cetaceans. But the draw of the historic center plus the submerged estuary of Ría Deseado (p457), brimming with seabirds and marine wildlife, make Puerto Deseado a worthy detour.

In 1520 the estuary provided shelter to Hernando de Magallanes after a crippling storm waylaid his fleet; he dubbed the area 'Río de los Trabajos' (River of Labours). In

1586 English privateer Cavendish explored the estuary and named it after his ship *Desire*, and this time the name stuck. The port attracted fleets from around the world for whaling and seal hunting, compelling the Spanish crown to send a squadron of colonists, under the command of Antonio de Viedma. After a harsh winter, more than 30 of them died of scurvy. Those who survived moved inland to form the short-lived colony of Floridablanca. In 1834 Darwin surveyed the estuary, as did Perito Moreno in 1876.

## Orientation

Puerto Deseado is two hours southeast of the RN 3 junction at Fitz Roy via dead-end RN 281. The center of activity is the axis formed by main streets San Martín and Almirante Brown.

## Information

Banks, ATMs, *locutorios* and internet are all found along San Martín.

**Banco de la Nación** (San Martín)

**CIS Tour** (☎ 487-2864; San Martín 916) Handles local tours and flight reservations.



**Ecowash** (☎ 487-0490; Piedra Buena 859; ☎ closed Sun) Full-service laundry.

**Hospital Distrital** (☎ 487-0200; España 991)

**Post office** (San Martín 1075)

**Ría Deseada Tourist Office** (☎ 487-0220; www

.puertodeseado.gov.ar in Spanish; San Martín 1525;

☎ 10am-1pm & 5-8pm Mon-Fri) There's another English-speaking desk at the bus terminal.

**Vagón Histórico Tourist Office** (cnr San Martín & Almirante Brown; ☎ 9am-9pm)

## Sights & Activities

A self-guided **walking tour** is a good start to catching the vibes of Deseado. Pick up a *Guía Histórica* map (in Spanish) from either tourist office.

Puerto Deseado was once the coastal terminus for a cargo and passenger route that hauled wool and lead from Chilean mines from Pico Truncado and Las Heras, 280km northwest. Choo-choo fans can check out the imposing English-designed **Estación del Ferrocarril Patagónico** (admission by donation; ☎ 4-7pm Mon-Sat), off Av Oneto, built by Yugoslav stonemasons in 1908.

In the center of town, the restored 1898 **Vagón Histórico** (cnr San Martín & Almirante Brown) is famous as the car from which rebel leader Facón Grande prepared the 'Patagonia Rebellion.' In 1979 the car was almost sold for scrap, but disgruntled townspeople blocked the roads to stop the sale. A few blocks west is the attractive **Sociedad Española** (San Martín 1176), c 1915.

The **Museo Regional Mario Brozoski** (☎ 487-0673; cnr Colón & Belgrano; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 3-7pm Sat) displays relics of the English corvette *Swift*, sunk off the coast of Deseado in 1776. Divers continue to recover artifacts from this wreck, located in 1982. Named for a Salesian priest, **Museo Padre Beauvoir** (☎ 487-0147; 12 de Octubre 577; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri) shows an eclectic combination of native relics, stuffed birds and objects donated by pioneer families.

Paddling and windsurfing can be enjoyed in summer. On the waterfront, **Club Náutico** (☎ 0297-15-419-0468) rents boards and kayaks (summer only). Depending on current conditions, sport fishing can be an option; inquire at the pier.

## Tours

**Darwin Expediciones** (☎ 0297-15-624-7554; www.darwin-expeditions.com; Av España 2601) Offers sea-kayaking trips, wildlife observation and multiday nature

and archaeology tours with knowledgeable guides. Their best seller is the tour of Reserva Natural Ría Deseado.

**Los Vikingos** (☎ 487-0020, 0297-15-624-5141/4283; www.losvikingos.com.ar; Estrada 1275) Offers excursions on land and sea. Tours, some led by marine biologists, include Reserva Natural Ría Deseado and Monumento Natural Bosques Petrificados.

## Sleeping

Ask the tourist office about (relatively) nearby *estancias*.

**Camping La Costanera** (☎ 0297-15-625-2890; Av Costanera; per person AR\$10, trailer bunks per person AR\$30; ☎ year-round) Rates at this waterfront campground vary by site. It has good toilets and showers, but incessant winds can be a nuisance and some campsites are stony.

**Camping Cañadón Giménez** (☎ 0297-15-673-6051; RN 281; per person/tent AR\$20/10, cabins AR\$50-80; ☎ year-round) Four kilometers northwest of town, but only 50m from the Ría Deseado, this campground is sheltered by forest and high rocky walls. Bare-bones cabins sleep four; the upgrade gets you heating and kitchen basics. Showers, hot water and basic provisions are available.

**Residencial Las Bandurrias** (☎ 487-0745; acantour@speedy.com.ar; Sarmiento 9050; s/d with breakfast AR\$80/105) The cavernous dimensions give this tiled building a slightly institutional feel, but its plain rooms are kept impeccably clean and its hostess is divine. Matrimonial beds are few.

**Residencial Los Olmos** (☎ 487-0077; Gregores 849; s/d/tr/q AR\$72/108/132/160) A solid budget option kept shipshape by a vigilant matron, this brick house has 17 small rooms with TV, heat and private bathrooms.

**Hotel Isla Chaffers** (☎ 487-2246; cnr San Martín y Mariano Moreno; s/d/tr AR\$140/170/190) Just the setting of this dark downtown hotel inspires a yawn, with its soft light and flower patterns. If you don't make it to your room, there are huge purple chaises in the hallway that beckon for lounging.

**Hotel Los Acantilados** (☎ 487-2167; www.hotellosacantilados.com.ar in Spanish; cnr Puyrredón & Av España; d AR\$140-220, suite AR\$400) More inspiring from outside than in, these cliff-top digs do boast an extensive lounge with fireplace, the perfect spot to chill out. Superior rooms and the dining room look out on the waterfront, while standard rooms are plain with dated bathrooms. There's a good café and conscientious staff.

**Cabañas Las Nubes** (☎ 0297-15-403-2677; Ameghino 1351; d/q cabins AR\$200/220) Currently the nicest lodging in town, these deluxe two- and three-

story wooden cabins bring you in reach of cloud nine. They sit on a hilltop, and some have ocean views, fully equipped kitchens and ample living space – ideal for groups and families.

## Eating

**Maca** (☎ 487-2134; San Martín 1263; sandwiches AR\$15; ☎ 1-3pm & 7:30-10pm, closed Mon) This brick café serves cheesy pizzas and sandwiches to fans of all ages. The ice cream comes highly recommended.

**El Refugio del Marino** (☎ 0297-15-621-5290; Puyrredón 224; tapas AR\$15; ☎ to 2am) Cheap *vino tinto* (red wine) and tapas feed the tale-swapping of the sailors and fishermen who gather at this friendly bar.

**Juniors** (☎ 0297-15-419-1297; 12 de Octubre 859; mains AR\$15-22; ☎ 9am-3am) *Milanesas* (breaded fish), empanadas and home-cooked meals are served in this casual trophy-packed social club. Kids play table tennis in the back while pops serves cold ones on a bar top painted with Curly, Larry and Mo.

**El Pinguino** (☎ 487-2105; Piedra Buena 958; mains AR\$21; ☎ closed Sun) This local institution cooks up fresh fish and pasta in an animated setting kept in check by the gregarious owner. There's also a set menu and good wine list.

**Puerto Crystal** (☎ 487-0378; Av España 1698; mains AR\$25-38; ☎ noon-3pm & 8pm-midnight, closed Wed lunch) Seafood looms large on the menu (fried calamari, paella and hearty soups), but steaks are also worth trying. The pink restaurant overlooks a small pond as you enter the center.

**Puerto Darwin** (☎ 247554; Av España 2581; menu del día AR\$35; ☎ 9am-2am; ☎) Featuring sandwiches, *picadas* and fish dishes, this café run by Darwin Expediciones has an easygoing atmosphere topped by unparalleled views of the port. At sunset it is a prime spot to crack open a beer.

## Drinking & Entertainment

Late-night drinking and dancing spots include the pub **Quinto Elemento** (cnr Don Bosco & 12 de Octubre) and the swanky disco **Jackaroe Boliche** (Mariano Moreno 663), in an unfortunate building.

## Getting There & Away

**LADE** (☎ 487-2674), at the bus terminal, can arrange flights leaving from Comodoro Rivadavia.

The **bus terminal** (Sargento Cabral 1302) is on the northeast side of town, nine long blocks

and slightly uphill from San Martín and Av Oneto. Taxis to/from the center should cost around AR\$12.

There are five departures daily to Caleta Olivia (AR\$31, three hours) at 4:15am, 6am, 1pm, 7pm and 7:30pm. All continue to Comodoro Rivadavia (AR\$44, four hours). Sportman's 7:30pm bus to Comodoro Rivadavia is timed to link with Sportman connections to El Calafate. Leaving on the 1pm bus (which doesn't run Sunday) allows for the quickest connection to Perito Moreno and Los Antiguos. Travelers headed to San Julián must connect through Caleta Olivia.

If you're thinking of getting off at godforsaken Fitz Roy (where locals claim the only thing to see is the wind!) to make progress toward Comodoro or Río Gallegos, think again: buses arrive at a demonic hour and the only place to crash is the campground behind Multirubro La Illusion.

## RESERVA NATURAL RÍA DESEADO

Flanked by sandy cliffs, these aquamarine waters create sculpted seascapes you won't forget. Moreover, it's considered one of South America's most important marine preserves. Ría Deseado is the unique result of a river abandoning its bed, allowing the Atlantic waters to invade 40km inland and create a perfect shelter for marine life.

The marine life is abundant. Several islands and other sites provide nesting habitats for seabirds, including Magellanic penguins, petrels, oystercatchers, herons, terns and five species of cormorants. Isla Chaffers is the main spot for the penguins, while Banco Cormorán offers protection to rock cormorants and the striking gray cormorant. Isla de los Pingüinos has nesting rockhoppers and breeding elephant seals. Commerson's dolphins, sea lions, guanacos and ñandús (ostrichlike rheas) can also be seen while touring the estuary.

The best time to visit the reserve is from December to April. Darwin Expediciones (opposite) runs circuits that take in viewing of Commerson's dolphins, Isla Chaffers, Banco Cormorán and a walk to a penguin colony (AR\$90, 2½ hours). The main attraction of the all-day Isla de los Pingüinos excursion (AR\$250) is the punked-out rockhopper penguins with spiky yellow and black head feathers, but the tour also includes wildlife watching, sailing and hiking. There's a four-to five-person minimum and tours leave

depending on tides, usually early morning or midafternoon. Los Vikingos (p456) makes similar excursions with bilingual guides and organizes overland trips.

## MONUMENTO NATURAL BOSQUES PETRIFICADOS

During Jurassic times, 150 million years ago, this area enjoyed a humid, temperate climate with flourishing forests, but intense volcanic activity buried them in ash. Erosion later exposed the mineralized *Proaraucaria* trees (ancestors of the modern *Araucaria*, unique to the southern hemisphere), up to 3m in diameter and 35m in length. Today, the 150-sq-km **Monumento Natural Bosques Petrificados** (Petrified Forests Natural Monument; admission free; ☎ 9am-9pm year-round) has a small visitor center, English-language brochure and short interpretive trail, leading from park headquarters to the largest concentration of petrified trees. Until its legal protection in 1954, the area was plundered for some of its finest specimens; please don't perpetuate this unsavory tradition.

Other parts of the scenic desert park also merit exploration, but consult with park rangers before heading toward the peak of Madre e Hija. Bring water; there's none at the site.

The park is 157km southwest of Caleta Olivia, accessed from the good gravel RP 49, leading 50km west from a turnoff at Km 2074 on RN 3. There's no public transport directly to the park. Buses from Caleta Olivia will drop you at the junction, but you may wait several hours for a lift into the park. Los Vikingos (p456) runs tours from Puerto Deseado.

There's basic camping, as well as provisions, at **La Paloma**, 20km before the park headquarters. Camping in the park is strictly prohibited.

## PUERTO SAN JULIÁN

☎ 02962 / pop 6143

The perfect desolate-yet-charismatic locale for an art film, this small town sits baking in bright light and dust, stark against Bahía San Julián's startling blue. Considered the cradle of Patagonian history, the port of San Julián was first landed in 1520 by Magellan. His encounter with local Tehuelches provided the region's mythical moniker (see the boxed text, opposite). But he was not the last to make his mark. Following him, Viedma, Drake and Darwin all ventured onto this sandy spit. While its human history is proudly put forth, the landscape

speaks of geologic revolutions, with its exposed, striated layers, rolling hills and golden cliffs.

Puerto San Julián's first non-native settlers came from the Falkland Islands with the late-19th-century wool boom. Scots followed with the San Julián Sheep Farming Company, which became the region's primary economic force for nearly a century. Recent growth has the city, 350km south of Caleta Olivia, developing like never before, with mining and sea-food-processing industries. For travelers, the port is a relaxed and welcoming stop, as well as the place to see Commerson's dolphins.

## Information

**Banco Santa Cruz** (cnr San Martín & Moreno) Has Link ATM.

**Dirección de Turismo** (☎ 454396; www.sanjulian.gov.ar in Spanish; Magallanes s/n; ☎ 7am-9pm Mon-Fri, 5-9pm Sat & Sun) There's also a high-season kiosk at San Martín 500.

**Post office** (cnr San Martín & Belgrano)

**Teléfono** (cnr San Martín & Rivadavia) *Locutorio* with internet.

## Sights & Activities

One small local adventure is to take a *remise* or your own poor abused rental car on the incredibly scenic 30km **Circuito Costero**, following Bahía San Julián on a dirt road. A series of golden bluffs divide beautiful beaches with drastic tides. The area includes a sea lion colony and the penitent attraction of Monte Cristo (with its stations of the cross). If you are in your own vehicle, make sure it is equipped with a spare tire.

Relive Magellan's landing at **Museo Nao Victoria** (admission AR\$8), a museum-cum-theme-park with life-sized figures cloaked in armor and shown celebrating mass and battling mutiny. Reproductions of everyday items provide some interest. You can't miss it – it's at the port on a boat, a reproduction of the *Nao Victoria*.

The last census found 130,000 penguins inhabiting Banco Cormorán, which you can visit by boat. Two-hour excursions on Bahía San Julián (AR\$80 per person) are run by **Expediciones Pinocho** (☎ 454600; cnr Mitre & 9 de Julio). The penguins stick around from September to April. The tour also stops at Banco Justicia, to see the cormorant rookeries and other seabirds. From December to March there's a good chance you'll see the Commerson's dolphin (p441), known as the world's smallest dolphin.

## BIG FEET, TALL TALES

Say 'Patagonia' and most think of fuzzy outdoor clothes, but the name that has come to symbolize the world's end still invites hot debate as to its origin.

One theory links the term 'Patagón' to a fictional monster in a best-selling 16th-century Spanish romance of the period, co-opted by Magellan's crew to describe the Tehuelche as they wintered in 1520 at Puerto San Julián. The moniker is traced to Italian nobleman Antonio Pigafetta, a crew member who described one Tehuelche as 'so tall we reached only to his waist...He was dressed in the skins of animals skillfully sewn together...His feet were shod with the same kind of skins, which covered his feet in the manner of shoes...The captain-general [Magellan] called these people Patagoni.'

Another theory suggests that the name comes from the Spanish *pata*, meaning paw or foot. No evidence corroborates the claim that the Tehuelche boasted unusually big feet (it's possible that the skins they wore made their feet seem exceptionally large). But it's good fodder for the genre of travelers' tales, where first impressions loom larger than life.

Another option is **trekking** the coastline and checking out the abundant birdlife. If you have a friend (or make one), you can rent **tandem bicycles** (☎ 02962-15-532312; per hr AR\$10) to explore the area. For more information on either activity, consult the tourist information kiosk.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Camping Municipal** (☎ 452806; Magallanes 650; per person/car AR\$3/5) On the waterfront at the north end of Vélez Sarsfield, this full-service campground has hot showers (AR\$1.50), laundry and windbreaks.

**Hostería Municipal** (☎ 452300; 25 de Mayo 917) At the time of writing, this waterfront mainstay was closed for renovations. Call for rates.

**Hotel Álamo** (☎ 454092; RN 3; d AR\$70) Next to the EG3 gas station (there's no sign; inquire inside) and the RN 3 junction, Álamo is a small, adequate place with dark shuttered rooms, a good restaurant and private bathrooms.

**La Casona** (☎ 452434; miramar@videodata.com.ar; Magallanes 650; s/t/q AR\$60/95/110) You can't miss this red corrugated house by the point. What appears to be the perennial haunt of fishermen is now the lodging of students and backpackers. If no one answers the door, ring the bell at the house directly behind it.

**Posada Kau Yenu** (☎ 452431; cnr San Martín & Calafate; s/d AR\$70/100) Don Ernesto fills this cozy home with good spirits and homemade bread for breakfast. If you are coming unannounced, be aware that the door is only attended in the evening and early-morning hours.

**Hotel Sada** (☎ 452013; www.hotelsada.com.ar in Spanish; San Martín 1112; s/d/t AR\$80/125/140) An abundant breakfast and friendly service add considerable cheer to this dated, boxy hotel with

dreary hall paneling and baby-blue furniture. Carpeted rooms feature thick duvet covers, small TVs and phones.

**Hotel Ocean** (☎ 452350; San Martín 959; s/d/t AR\$95/130/150) This bright, remodeled brick building has attractive rooms with firm beds and a backdrop of tropical tones. Service is so-so and some rooms lack windows, but triples are unusually spacious.

**Hotel Bahía** (☎ 454028; www.hotelbahiasanjulian.com.ar in Spanish; San Martín 1075; s/d/t/ste AR\$130/165/190/290; ☑) This lovely, glass-front hotel feels decadent in a place like San Julián. Rooms are modern and beds firm. TV and laundry service are perks. The café-bar is an appealing setting for breakfast or just coffee.

**La Rural** (☎ 454066; Ameghino 811; mains AR\$16-25) Service is friendly but the hearty food mediocre; still, the whole town seems to congregate at this unpretentious spot. Fare ranges from meat and potatoes to grilled fish and pastas.

**La Juliana** (☎ 454149; Zeballos 1130; mains AR\$40; ☎ dinner Tue-Sun) This renovated old home offers well-prepared versions of popular meals, but guests are mostly paying for the cool ambience.

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

**LADE** (☎ 452137), located at the bus terminal, soars on Tuesdays for Puerto Deseado (AR\$65), continuing to Comodoro Rivadavia (AR\$138).

### BUS

Most RN 3 buses visit San Julián's **bus terminal** (☎ 452082; San Martín 1552) at insane hours. **Via Tac** (☎ 454453) goes to Puerto Madryn (AR\$110,



10am-1pm & 5-8pm Sat & Sun) Most helpful, with maps, bilingual staff and detailed info.

**Telefónica** (Av Roca 1328) One of several late-night *locutorios* on Av Roca with internet access.

**Thaler Cambio** (Av San Martín 484; ☎ 10am-3pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat) Changes traveler's checks.

**Tur Aike** (☎ 422436; turaiteturismo@ciudad.com.ar; Zapiola 63) Helpful for airline bookings.

## Sights

The pretty **Plaza San Martín** offers quiet benches in the shade of poplars and purple-blossom jacarandas.

Satiate your appetite for dinosaur dioramas and modern art at **Complejo Cultural** (☎ 423290; Ramón y Cajal 51; admission free; ☎ 10am-7pm), offering exhibits on anthropology, paleontology, geology and fine arts. The Tehuelche ethnology exhibit includes fascinating photographs and local history.

With a mission to educate through art, **Museo de Arte Eduardo Minnicelli** (☎ 436323; Maipú 13; admission free; ☎ 8am-7pm Tue-Fri, 3-7pm Sat & Sun) shows rotating exhibits from larger museums and paintings by Santa Cruz artists. It is also a good spot to get news on local cultural gatherings. Perhaps a must-see for Brits, the **Museo Malvinas Argentinas** (☎ 420128; Pasteur 74; admission free; ☎ 1:30-7pm Mon-Fri) gets inside the Argentine claim to the Islas Malvinas.

In a prefabricated 1890s metal-clad house shipped from England, the **Museo de los Pioneros** (☎ 437763; cnr Elcano & Alberdi; admission free; ☎ 10am-8pm) has good displays on early immigrant life. **Funda Cruz** (G Lista 60) is another attractive, imported, prefabricated wooden house. Once a customs office, it now hosts cultural activities as well as a *salón de té* (teahouse).

## Tours

The large penguin rookery at Cabo Virgenes, 140km southeast of Río Gallegos, can be visited from October to March. Excursions can be booked through **Maca Tobiano Turismo** (☎ 422466; Av Roca 998); an eight-hour trip costs AR\$145 (plus AR\$10 park admission).

## Sleeping

Since hotels cater mainly to business travelers, good-value budget accommodations are scarce.

## BUDGET

**Casa de Familia Elcira Contreras** (☎ 429856; Zuccarino 431; dm AR\$30, d with bathroom AR\$90) This friendly hostel

offers clean, homey dorms with kitchen access, and one double room. It's far from the center but a 10-minute walk from the bus terminal.

## MIDRANGE

**Hotel Covadonga** (☎ 420190; hotelcovadongargl@hotmail.com; Av Roca 1244; d/tr/q with bathroom AR\$110/140/170, d/tr without bathroom AR\$85/110) Good value and grandmotherly, the tidy Covadonga has appealing large rooms with creaky floors, and a sunny living room with worn leather sofas. Rooms with private bathrooms are worth the upgrade. Cash discounts are offered.

**Hotel Cabo Virgenes** (☎ 422134/41; hotelcabo virgenes@speedy.com.ar; Comodoro Rivadavia 252; s/d/tr/q AR\$85/115/170/190) A good-value option just a few blocks from the river, this yellow house features tiled rooms off narrow hallways. With the exception of family rooms, most can be cramped, but all are quiet.

**La Posada** (☎ 436445; hosterialaposada@infovia.com.ar; Ameghino 331; s/d AR\$100/120) Cool, carpeted and clean rooms surround a well-cared-for internal garden at this attractive inn. Meals are served in the ranch-style dining area.

**El Viejo Miramar** (☎ 430401; Av Roca 1630; d AR\$135) Snug carpeted rooms and spotless bathrooms make this affable choice a good one. Its personable owner makes guests at ease. Rates include breakfast (but not a second cup of coffee).

**Hotel Sehuen** (☎ 425683; www.hotelsehuen.com in Spanish; Rawson 160; s/d/tr/q AR\$98/146/161/192) Boasting national-level service awards, modern Sehuen provides all-round good value. Bright and airy, the breakfast area has vaulted ceilings and the day's newspaper. Rooms are plain but well kept and have TVs.

**Hotel Croacia** (☎ 422997; hotelcroaciargl@yahoo.com.ar; Urquiza 431; s/d/tr/apt AR\$126/160/170/200; ☎) This former Yugoslav community center is now a popular family-oriented hotel. While its faux-wood walls and leather armchairs are not for all, the carpeted rooms are pleasant and quiet time is respected. Breakfast is available in the 24-hour *confitería*.

**Apart Hotel Austral** (☎ 435588; www.apartaustral.com in Spanish; Av Roca 1505; d/apt AR\$180/200; ☎ ☎) Clean and modern, these pastel rooms boast good showers, stylish duvets and crisp linens. The hotel is nonsmoking and has wi-fi throughout. Mini-apartments have basic kitchens.

## TOP END

**Hotel Santa Cruz** (☎ 420601/2; http://usuarios.advance.com.ar/htlscruz; cnr Av Roca & Comodoro Rivadavia; s/d/tr

AR\$153/223/265; ☎) Remodeling for a sleeker, suit-and-tie ambience, this downtown monolith is impeccably clean but currently a little short on charm (see the rubber shower curtains). Rooms have wi-fi and there's a busy café downstairs. Opt for the rooms along the internal patio. A small fee gets you time in the sauna.

**Hotel Comercio** (☎ 422458; hotelcomercio@infomai.com.ar; Av Roca 1302; s/d/tr AR\$160/223/274; ☎) Comercio caters to your inner businessperson with pleasant rooms with airtight shutters. The main drawback is the lingering smell of cigarettes. The brassy café-bar does brisk business. Cash payment earns a 10% discount.

**Apart Hotel Costa Río** (☎ 423027; Av San Martín 673; d/tr/q AR\$310/412/484; ☎) The '80s motif plays a big hand in this apartment hotel under siege by flower prints and heavy drapes. The apartments include kitchenettes, living rooms and separate bedrooms. Desk staff speak English and the hotel is family-friendly. Rates include breakfast and sauna, and cash payment nets a 15% discount.

## Eating & Drinking

**Panadería Zapiola** (cnr Rawson & Zapiola; snacks AR\$5; ☎ 24hr) Choose from dozens of sweet and savory confections at this bustling corner bakery. It's best to come early while the selections are still warm.

**Rincón de Arte Café** (Bernadino Rivadavia 131; snacks AR\$9; ☎) 3-8pm Mon-Fri) Adjoined to an excellent gallery, this ambient coffee shop gets the creative juices flowing. It features regular art talks and courses, and sells beautiful blown glass and jewelry.

**Pizza Express** (☎ 434400; Av San Martín 650; mains AR\$10) Cheap and casual, this is where students and families dine on burgers, gnocchi and salads. The signature pizzas can be oily.

**Confitería Zapiola** (☎ 420797; Chacabuco 104; sandwiches AR\$17) Brick styling and alt rock bring freshness to this neighborhood snack spot, prized by local youth.

**18 Horas** (☎ 434541; Av Roca 1315; menu del día AR\$20) A true neighborhood joint with cracked vinyl chairs and Boca football memorabilia. Half the fun is the seasoned waiter who addresses clients as 'captain' or 'old man.' There is a hearty daily special, but chicken Provencal with fries is also a good choice.

**Don Bartolo** (☎ 427297; Sarmiento 124; pizzas AR\$21) Serious *parrilla* and stone-oven pizzas with fresh toppings are the highlights here. Create-your-own salads are good veggie options.

**Lagunacazul** (☎ 444114; cnr G Lista & Sarmiento; mains AR\$16-32; ☎ closed Mon) Innovative and artsy, Lagunacazul dares to take Patagonian cuisine to new places, with stir-fried trout and pesto-encrusted lamb. Reservations are recommended.

**RoCo** (☎ 420203; Av Roca 1157; mains AR\$30; ☎ closed Sun dinner & Mon lunch) This upscale eatery gets attention for swift service and ample options. The extensive menu includes salads, pasta, seafood and *parrilla*, as well as a full wine list.

**Club Británico** (☎ 427320; Av Roca 935; mains AR\$30) If Chatwin couldn't resist it, how can you? There's a smoky allure to this old boy's club, ideal for an after-dinner whiskey, since the fine dining tends toward the drab side.

**El Horreo** (☎ 426462; Av Roca 862; mains AR\$34; ☎) Dangling vines, low lights and crisp linens add spark to this historic Sociedad Española building with a pleasant upstairs bar. It's the kind of place to see and be seen; while you're at it you can try Spanish specialties.

## Shopping

**Rincón Gaucho** (☎ 420669; Av Roca 619) Aspiring gauchos and gauchitas can outfit themselves with the luxurious leathers and embossed designs that are the signature of this upscale leather shop. You can also find nice gifts ranging from knives with molded handles and chaps to *mate* paraphernalia. The owner enthusiastically explains the purpose and customs of every stylish hat.

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

Río Gallegos' **Stand International Airport** (RGL; ☎ 442340) is 7km northwest of town. Airport tax is AR\$6.

**Aerolíneas Argentinas** (☎ 422020/21; Av San Martín 545) flies daily to Buenos Aires (AR\$675) and frequently to Ushuaia (AR\$276). **LADE** (☎ 422316; Fagnano 53/57) flies several times a week to Río Grande (AR\$114), El Calafate (AR\$118), Comodoro Rivadavia (AR\$184), Ushuaia (AR\$174) and Buenos Aires (AR\$318).

### BUS

Río Gallegos' **bus terminal** (☎ 442159; cnr RN 3 & Eva Perón) is 3km southwest of the center. Companies include **El Pingüino** (☎ 442169), **Lider** (☎ 442160), **Bus Sur** (☎ 442687), **Andesmar** (☎ 442195), **Sportman** (☎ 442595) and **TAC** (☎ 442042). Companies going to Chile include

**Ghisoni** (☎ 442687), **Pacheco** (☎ 442765) and **Tecni-Austral** (☎ 442427). **Taqsa** (☎ 423130; www.taqa.com.ar in Spanish; Estrada 71) beelines straight from the airport to Puerto Natales and El Calafate.

Destination	Cost (AR\$)	Duration (hr)
Buenos Aires	290-348	36-40
Caleta Olivia	90	7-10
Comodoro Rivadavia	100-127	9-11
El Calafate	40	4-5
El Chaltén	60	9
Esquel	160	19
Los Antiguos	140	12
Puerto Madryn	160	15-20
Puerto Natales (Chile)	32	5-7
Punta Arenas (Chile)	35	5-6
Río Grande	85	7-8
Río Turbio	35	5
San Julián	42	4½
Trelew	155-186	14-17
Ushuaia	125	12-14

## Getting Around

It's easy to share metered taxis (AR\$15) between downtown, the bus terminal and the airport. From Av Roca, buses marked 'B' or 'terminal' link the center and the bus terminal (AR\$1.30).

Car rental is expensive due to the poor conditions of the roads to most places of interest. Despite exchange rates, rental deals are often better in Punta Arenas, Chile – see p506. For local rentals, try **Riestra Rent A Car** (☎ 421321; Av San Martín 1504).

## ESTANCIAS AROUND RÍO GALLEGOS

Visiting a working *estancia* affords an intimate glimpse into the unique Patagonian life-style. These are not luxury hotels, but homes that have been converted into comfortable lodgings. Meals are often shared with the owners, and token participation in the daily working life is encouraged. Booking ahead is essential, since most places are open only in summer and fill up fast. For *estancias* in Santa Cruz province, contact the provincial tourist office in Río Gallegos (p461) or see www.estanciasdesantacruz.com.

Dedicated to anglers, **Estancia Güer Aike** (☎ in Río Gallegos 02966-423895, in Buenos Aires 011-4394-3486; 4 nights & 3 days regular/angler AR\$1050/2101; ☎ Oct-Apr) has a lovely renovated lodge, Truchaiké, enjoying 12km of private river frontage in a world-famous trout-fishing destination. Rates include all meals, drinks, fishing permits and

guided fishing. Day-trippers can visit the ranch for lunch or dinner (AR\$63) – call in advance. It's at the junction of northbound RN 3 and westbound RP 5, 35km west of Río Gallegos.

**Estancia Monte Dinero** (☎ 02966-426900; www.monte-dinero.com.ar in Spanish; day trip AR\$180, per person with breakfast/full board AR\$330/400; ☎ Oct-Apr), named for gold once found on the coast, is a comfortable, old-world lodging with intricate hand-painted doors, billiards and well-appointed rooms. On RP 1, 120km south of Río Gallegos, it's been run by the same English-speaking family for five generations. Dudes see the typical *estancia* activities – dog demos, shearing etc – and can also take trips to **Cabo Virgenes**, where Magellanic penguins nest September through March. A museum at the *estancia* displays an intriguing assortment of goods salvaged from the wreckage of the ship that sunk soon after the family Greenshyls sailed here from Ireland in 1886. Travel agencies in Río Gallegos offer day trips to the *estancia* starting in mid-November, usually making a quick stop at the *estancia's casco*.

## INLAND PATAGONIA (ALONG RN 40)

Save for the travel hubs of El Calafate and El Chaltén, rutted RN 40 is every bit a no-man's-land. It parallels the backbone of the Andes, where ñandús doodle through sagebrush, trucks kick up whirling dust and gas stations rise on the horizon like oases. It is the ultimate road trip.

The paving of RN 40 will clearly mark the identity of a generation. At present, travel is long and hard but small hamlets along the way benefit. When the pavement settles, most motorists are likely to whiz from point A to point B, missing the quirky, unassuming settlements. For now, public transport stays limited to a few summer-only tourist shuttle services, and driving requires both preparation and patience.

RN 40 parallels the Andes from north of Bariloche to the border with Chile near Puerto Natales, then cuts east to the Atlantic Coast. Highlights include the Perito Moreno and Los Glaciares national parks, the rock art of Cueva de los Manos and remote *estancias*. This section picks up RN 40 in Esquel, from where it continues paved until south of

Gobernador Costa, where it turns to gravel. From there on down, it's gravel most of the way, with some paved sections, mainly near population centers.

## ESQUEL

☎ 02945 / pop 36,000 / elev 570m

If you have tired of the gnome-in-the-chocolate-shop ambience of Bariloche and other cutesy Lakes District destinations, regular old Esquel will feel like a breath of fresh air. Set in western Chubut's dramatic, hikeable foothills, Esquel mainly attracts visitors stopping over on their way to Parque Nacional Los Alerces and other Andean recreation areas. Most people zip through en route to Bariloche or Chile, but it's an easy-going and exceedingly friendly base camp for abundant adventure activities – the perfect place to chill for a few days after hard traveling on RN 40.

Founded at the turn of the 20th century, Esquel is the region's main livestock and commercial center. It's also the historic southern end of the line for La Trochita, the narrow-gauge steam train (see the boxed text, p468). The town takes its name from a term of the language of the Mapuche meaning either 'bog' or 'place of the thistles.'

## Orientation

RN 259 zigzags through town to the junction with RN 40, which heads north to El Bolsón and south to Comodoro Rivadavia. South of town, RN 259 passes a junction for Parque Nacional Los Alerces en route to Trevelin.

## Information

**ACA** (Automóvil Club Argentino; ☎ 452383; cnr 25 de Mayo & Av Ameghino) Inside YPF gas station; sells fishing licenses.

**Banco de la Nación** (cnr Av Alvear & General Roca) Has ATM and changes traveler's checks.

**Banco del Chubut** (Av Alvear 1131) Has ATM.

**Biblioteca Pública** (San Martín, btwn Mitre & Moreno; ☎ 8:30am-7:30pm) Free internet.

**Cyber Club** (Av Alvear 961; ☎ 10:30am-midnight Mon-Fri, noon-12:30am Sat, 4pm-midnight Sun) Internet access.

**Hospital Zonal** (☎ 451074; 25 de Mayo 150)

**Laverap** (Mitre 543; per load AR\$12) Self- or full-service laundry.

**Post office** (cnr Avs Fontana & Alvear)

**Tourist office** (☎ 451927; www.esquel.gov.ar in Spanish; Av Alvear 1220; ☎ 7am-11pm) Well organized, helpful and multilingual.

## Sights & Activities

Esquel's best attractions are of the outdoor variety, notably Parque Nacional Los Alerces and La Hoya. In town, there is **Museo de Culturas Originarias Patagónicas** (☎ 451929; Belgrano 330; admission by donation; ☎ 8:30am-1pm & 2:30-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon & 5-8pm Sat, 5-8pm Sun), displaying a modest collection of Mapuche artifacts.

The Roca train station houses a free **train museum** (☎ 451403; www.latrochita.org.ar; cnr Roggero & Urquiza; ☎ 8am-2pm Mon-Sat). Even travelers arriving by bus or air should try to witness the arrival or departure of **La Trochita**, Argentina's famous narrow-gauge steam train.

Esquel's nearby lakes and rivers offer excellent **fly-fishing**, with the season running from November to April. You can purchase a license at most gas stations, including the **YPF gas station** (cnr 25 de Mayo & Av Ameghino; ☎ daylight hours) that houses the ACA.

Full-day **white-water rafting** trips go to upper and lower sections of the glacial-fed Río Corcovado for float trips (class II) and serious white-water assaults (class IV). **Mountain biking** is a good way to get out of town and explore the surrounding hills and trails. For **skiing** information, see the La Hoya section (p469).

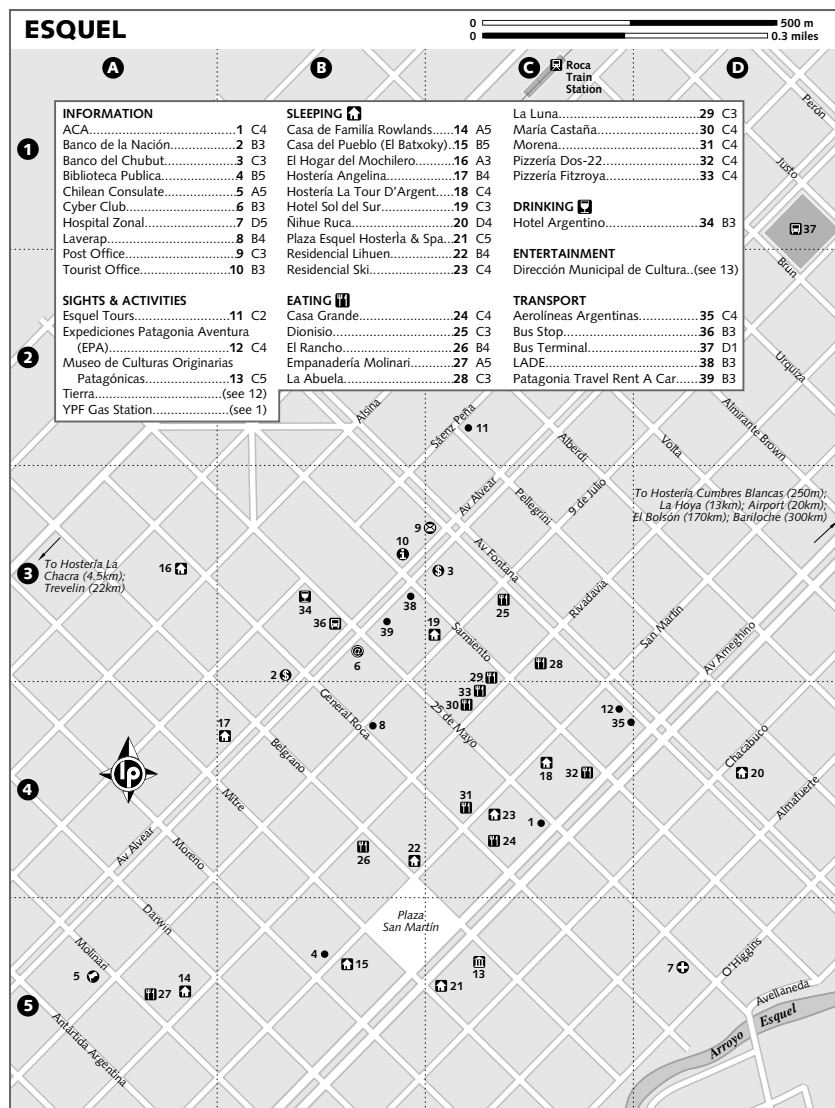
## Tours

Numerous travel agencies, including **Esquel Tours** (☎ 452832; esqueltours@ar.inter.net; Pellegrini 881), sell tickets for the Circuito Lacustre boat excursion in Parque Nacional Los Alerces (see p475); buying a ticket in Esquel assures a place on the often-crowded trip. Full-day excursions, including the lake cruise, cost AR\$85 when sailing from Puerto Chucao or AR\$110 from Puerto Limonao, including transfers to and from the park.

Excursions to El Bolsón/Lago Puelo and Corcovado/Carrenleufú (full day AR\$85) are also offered. Half-day trips include La Hoya's winter-sports complex; the nearby Welsh settlement of Trevelin and the Futaleufú hydroelectric complex (AR\$40); and the narrow-gauge railway excursion to Nahuel Pan.

For rafting and outdoor adventures, **Expediciones Patagonia Aventura** (EPA; ☎ 454366, 02945-15-684085; www.grupoepa.com in Spanish; Av Fontana 482) offers myriad options. Since the Río Corcovado is 90km away, rafting trips (class III/IV AR\$145/210) spend two to four hours on the river; the harder trips are shorter, though they're usually action-packed. Half-day trips are available as well. Once you're





there you might want to take advantage of the peaceful surroundings: one interesting option is to stay at EPA's riverside hostel.

In summer EPA also offers canopy tours, horseback riding (full day AR\$110) and trekking (full day AR\$110) at its mountain center, an attractive wooden lodge (full pension AR\$150) based in Parque Nacional Los

Alerces. Ask about the new boat/hike combination to Río Frei.

Ski rentals are available through **Tierra** (☎ 454366; www.grupoepa.com in Spanish; Av Fontana 482) for AR\$30 to AR\$70 per day, with performance skis at the high end. In summer they rent bikes and can hook you up with a mountain-biking guide or trail details.

## Festivals & Events

**Semana de Esquel** A weeklong February event that celebrates the city's 1906 founding.

**Fiesta Nacional de Esquí** (National Skiing Festival) Takes place in mid-September at La Hoya.

## Sleeping

### BUDGET

**El Hogar del Mochilero** (☎ 452166; www.cpatagonia.com.ar in Spanish; General Roca 1028; dm AR\$15, camping per person AR\$10) Follow the life-sized plaster backpacker to these cheaper-than-dirt accommodations. When we visited, they were undergoing renovations and adding doubles. There's an enormous group bunk room (bring a sleep sack), shady backyard camping, a kitchen, free firewood and hot showers. If no one is around, check the house across the street.

**our pick Casa del Pueblo** (El Batxoky; ☎ 450581; www.grupoepa.com in Spanish; San Martín 661; dm/d/tr AR\$33/80/111) Run with dedication and affection, this slightly sagging hostel offers cool shared spaces but would do well to dump the ashtrays. Perks include kitchen use, a laundry room, mountain bike rentals and a grassy yard. Connected with EPA tour agency, it has handy connections for active pursuits. Breakfast is AR\$3.

**Casa de Familia Rowlands** (☎ 452578; Rivadavia 330; r per person AR\$35) This affable family home offers three basic rooms (only one with private bathroom). It's about seven blocks from the center.

### MIDRANGE

**Residencial Lihuen** (☎ 452589; San Martín 822; s/d AR\$85/95) These ample rooms tend to be dated and mismatched, but serviceable. They're well located near the leafy Plaza San Martín. Breakfast is AR\$5.

**Residencial Ski** (☎ 451646; San Martín 961; s/d AR\$70/110) Clean and friendly Ski doesn't win any style points with its faux-wood paneling, but rooms include cable TV and parking is available.

**Hostería Angelina** (☎ 452763; www.hosteriaangelina.com.ar; Av Alvear 758; s/d standard AR\$120/160, superior AR\$140/180; ☑) Hospitable and polished, Angelina follows international standards with professional service and a good breakfast buffet. Superior rooms offer extra space and there is a courtyard with fountain.

**Nihue Ruca** (☎ 452891; nihueruca@ciudad.com.ar; Chacabuco 1253; 2-person apt AR\$140) This vaguely

Swiss apartment hotel offers immaculate accommodations lorded over by granny style. Snug and fully equipped, apartments are sharply discounted in low season.

**Hostería La Chacra** (☎ 452802; rinilachacra@ciudad.com.ar; RN 259, Km 4; d/tr AR\$150/180; ☑) If you want a shot of local culture, nothing is better than this country lodging in a 1970s home with ample bright rooms, generous gringo breakfasts and thick down bedding. Owner Rini Griffiths, who sings in Esquel's Welsh chorus, is a real joy. Get here via taxi or Trevelin bus – they pass hourly.

**Hostería La Tour D'Argent** (☎ 454612; www.latourdargent.com.ar in Spanish; San Martín 1063; d AR\$180) Some rooms are avidly depressing here, with brown terrycloth bedspreads, but others are cheery and comfy so have a look around. The restaurant offers an extensive take-out menu and uses organic farm-fresh products.

### TOP END

**Hotel Sol del Sur** (☎ 452189; www.hsoldelsur.com.ar in Spanish; 9 de Julio 1086; s/d with buffet breakfast AR\$170/200, superior d AR\$230) Geared towards groups, this hotel travels time, with leather-paneled doors, and dated wood and vinyl decor. On the upside, it is clean, with minibars and a big breakfast spread. Superior rooms are a notable step up. There's a 10% cash discount.

**Plaza Esquel Hostería & Spa** (☎ 457002; http://patagoniaandesgroup.com.ar; Av Ameghino 713; s/d/tr AR\$181/228/310; ☑) A new addition in front of the plaza, this attractive *hostería* offers modern rooms with new fixtures, free internet access and wi-fi. Spa services include access to a Jacuzzi and sauna.

**Hostería Cumbres Blancas** (☎ 455100; www.cumbresblancas.com.ar in Spanish; Av Ameghino 1683; s/d AR\$395/450; ☑) Esquel's best inn is shiny and lavish, but does not surpass its packaged feel. Sportsmen and women will enjoy having their own fly-casting pond and putting green for a few days. Indoor pampering starts with the health club's sauna and steam bath. Rooms are decked out in crisp colors and fresh-feeling linens. Service is attentive and there's wi-fi throughout.

## Eating

**María Castaña** (☎ 451752; cnr 25 de Mayo & Rivadavia; snacks AR\$8) A favorite at this frilly café is waffles with *dulce de leche*; it's also good for breakfast, sandwiches and ice-cream sundaes. Grab an overstuffed chair in the back.



## LA TROCHITA: THE OLD PATAGONIAN EXPRESS

Clearly an anachronism in the jet age, Ferrocarril Roca's **La Trochita** (☎ 02945-451403 in Esquel; [www.latrochita.org.ar](http://www.latrochita.org.ar)), Argentina's famous narrow-gauge steam train, averages less than 30km/h on its meandering weekly journey between Esquel and El Maitén – if it runs at speed. Despite the precarious economics of its operations, the project has survived even the most concerted efforts to shut it down. In its current incarnation, subsidized by the city of Esquel and the governments of Río Negro and Chubut, La Trochita – which Paul Theroux facetiously called *The Old Patagonian Express* – provides both a tourist attraction and a service for local citizens.

Like many other state projects, completion of the line seemed an interminable process. In 1906 the federal government authorized the southern branch of the Roca line, between Puerto San Antonio on the Atlantic coast and Lago Nahuel Huapi. In 1922 Ferrocarriles del Estado began work on the narrow-gauge section; it didn't reach the halfway point of Norquín until 1939. In 1941 the line made it to the workshops at El Maitén, and in 1945 it reached the end of the line at Esquel.

Since then, the line has suffered some of the oddest mishaps in railroad history. Three times within a decade, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the train was derailed by high winds, and ice has caused other derailments. In 1979 a collision with a cow derailed the train at Km 243 south of El Maitén; the engine driver was the appropriately named Señor Bovino.

In full operation until 1993, La Trochita's 402km route between Esquel and Ingeniero Jacobacci was probably the world's longest remaining steam-train line, with half a dozen stations and another nine *apeaderos* (whistle-stops). The Belgian Baldwin and German Henschel engines refilled their 4000L water tanks at strategically placed *parajes* (pumps) every 40km to 45km. Most of the passenger cars, heated by wood stoves, date from 1922, as do the freight cars.

During summer, the **Tren Turístico** (adult/student AR\$30/24; ☎ 10am Wed & Sat) travels from Roca station in Esquel to Nahuel Pan, the first station down the line, 20km east. The trip takes 45 minutes. It's popular with groups so book ahead. For a small additional charge, you can organize with one of the Esquel travel agencies to return by minibus. La Trochita also offers infrequent passenger service between Esquel and El Maitén, a nine-hour ride. Verify the current timetable online.

**Morena** (☎ 02945-15-695-139; cnr San Martín & General Roca; [www.morenoestobar.com.ar](http://www.morenoestobar.com.ar); mains AR\$12; ☎ noon-midnight) Relaxed and warm, this brick yuppie watering hole is ideal for a glass of wine or cup of joe. Cheap victuals include decent sandwiches, pasta and pizzas.

**our pick La Luna** (☎ 453800; [www.lalunarestobar.com.ar](http://www.lalunarestobar.com.ar) in Spanish; Rivadavia 1080; mains AR\$15, pizzas AR\$30; ☎ noon-4pm & 7pm-1am) This homey rock-n-roll restaurant-bar offers tasty spinach pizzas and heaping portions of steak and fries. The evening crowd spills out of wooden booths and brick nooks, drinking Patagonia's artisan beers.

**Empanadería Molinari** (☎ 454687; Molinari 633; dozen empanadas AR\$15) Belcha and Jorge bake mouthwatering take-out empanadas. If you can wait for a few minutes they'll heat them up.

**La Abuela** (☎ 451704; Rivadavia 1109; main AR\$15) Shoehorn yourself into this family nook decked out in lace tablecloths, and enjoy

cheap gnocchi and home-cooked classics like *puchero* (vegetable and meat stew) with a carafe of passable house wine.

**Casa Grande** (☎ 452370, 02945-15-469712; General Roca 445; mains AR\$22) Dig into flavorful jabalí (wild boar) and baked trout at this fine-dining spot, specializing in regional cuisine. The rambling house with burlwood chandeliers offers plenty of atmosphere. Portions are generous and there are some good vegetarian options on offer.

**Dionisio** (☎ 02945-15-507749; Av Fontana 656; mains AR\$24) Enjoy the eclectic, artsy atmosphere in this yellow house, ideal for a *sobre mesa* (table talk). There are vegetarian options but crepes, both savory and sweet, are the house specialty. The restaurant re-opens after lunch at 6pm for tea.

**El Rancho** (☎ 451931; cnr Rivadavia & Belgrano; parilla AR\$30) A satisfying corner grill offering plates of mixed meats and sausages in addition to salads and varied pastas. Follow your nose –

the smoky smells of barbecue permeate the block at lunch hour.

Worthwhile pizzerias (mains AR\$15 and up) include **Pizzería Fitzroya** (☎ 450512; Rivadavia 1050) and **Pizzería Dos-22** (☎ 454995; cnr Av Ameghino & Sarmiento).

## Drinking & Entertainment

**Dirección Municipal de Cultura** (☎ 451929; Belgrano 330) Sponsors regular music, cinema, theater and dance.

**Hotel Argentino** (☎ 452237; 25 de Mayo 862; ☎ 4pm-5am) This lanky and lowbrow Wild West saloon is much better suited to drinking than sleeping. By all means stop by: the owner is friendly, the 1916 construction is stuffed with relics and sculptures, and the place gets more than a little lively on weekends. Pool tables are available.

See the restaurant-bars listed under Eating for other options.

## Getting There & Around

### AIR

Esquel's **airport** (ESQ; ☎ 451676) is 20km east of town off RN 40. Taxis cost AR\$35.

**Aerolíneas Argentinas** (☎ 453614; Av Fontana 406) flies to Bariloche (AR\$1539) and Buenos Aires (AR\$1256) several times a week.

**LADE** (☎ 452124; Av Alvear 1085) flies several times weekly to Bariloche (AR\$103), Comodoro Rivadavia (AR\$176) and Buenos Aires (AR\$395), and at least once a week to Puerto Madryn (AR\$181), Río Gallegos (AR\$411) and El Calafate (AR\$411).

### BUS

Esquel's full-service **bus terminal** (☎ 451477/79; cnr Av Alvear & Brun) is an easy walk from the center.

**Transportes Jacobsen** (☎ 453528) goes to Futaleufú, Chile (AR\$15, 1½ hours), Monday and Friday at 8am and 6pm. Buses go hourly to Trevelin (AR\$3, 30 minutes), stopping near the corner of Av Alvear and 25 de Mayo on the way out of town. Buses to El Maitén (AR\$16, two hours) leave at 1:30pm Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, returning at 4pm.

In summer, **Transportes Esquel** (☎ 453529) goes through Parque Nacional Los Alerces (AR\$9, 1¼ hours) to Lago Futaleufú daily at 8am and 4pm. The first bus goes all the way to Lago Puelo (AR\$23, six hours), stopping in Lago Verde (AR\$13) at 10:30am and Chollila at noon. If you plan on exploring the area by

bus, purchase an open ticket (AR\$30), which allows passengers to make stops along the way between Esquel and Lago Puelo or vice-versa. Service is reduced off-season.

There are daily departures to the following destinations:

Destination	Cost (AR\$)	Duration (hr)
Bariloche	37	4¼
Buenos Aires	203	30
Comodoro Rivadavia	61	8-9
El Bolsón	19	2½
Neuquén	100	10
Puerto Madryn	115	7-9
Río Gallegos	160	19
Trelew	81	8-9

## TRAIN

The narrow-gauge steam train **La Trochita** (also known by the Spanish diminutive **El Trencito**) departs from the diminutive **Roca train station** (☎ 451403; [www.latrochita.org.ar](http://www.latrochita.org.ar); cnr Roggero & Urquiza; ☎ 8am-2pm Mon-Sat). There's a frequent tourist-oriented service to Nahuel Pan (see the boxed text, opposite) and infrequent passenger service to the railroad workshops at El Maitén (nine hours). For the timeless *Old Patagonian Express* feeling, it's best to catch a bus to El Maitén for the less touristy excursion to Desvío Thomae, but this service is sporadically available. Confirm schedules online or via the tourist office.

## CAR

Compact rental rates start around AR\$100 a day, including 100km and insurance. Try **Patagonia Travel Rent A Car** (☎ 455811, 02945-15-692174; [www.patagoniatravelrentacar.com](http://www.patagoniatravelrentacar.com) in Spanish; Av Alvear 1041), which has a good range of vehicles.

## AROUND ESQUEL

### La Hoya

Only 13km north of Esquel, with a base elevation of 1350m, the winter-sports area of **La Hoya** (☎ 02945-453018; [www.esquelonline.com/esqui.htm](http://www.esquelonline.com/esqui.htm); full-day lift pass AR\$52) is a family-friendly favorite of Argentines and Chileans. The addition of new lifts has doubled the terrain and the powder skiing is some of Argentina's best.

The terrain consists of open bowls, with most trails above the tree line, allowing for a longer season than most ski areas. While it's cheaper and less crowded than Bariloche, experienced skiers will find it smaller and

## SURVIVING RUTA NACIONAL 40

Patagonia's RN 40 is the quintessential road trip. No one gets anywhere fast here – the weather can be wily and the gravel loose. It can seem to go on forever. But it can also be magical when you've been rattling along for hours and the interminable flatline of steppe suddenly bursts open with views of glacial peaks and gem-colored lakes.

The road is half-paved, and plans to finish the job are long overdue. When it is finished, the life that slow travel brought to the small roadside towns is bound to diminish. So, if you want to drive this dirt behemoth, now is the time to giddy up.

Conditions from December to March are generally fine, but heavy precipitation can render some parts inaccessible. Most of the mythic route's unpaved stretches are wide and compacted, although some of the paved sections already show serious wear. Just be thankful you didn't set out on a bike or motorcycle.

### Be Prepared

Everyone should travel with necessary repair equipment. If renting a car, carry two full-size *neumáticos* (spare tires), make sure that the headlights work and that suspension, tires and brakes are in good shape. The gravel can puncture gas tanks so be sure to have some extra fuel on hand, as well as oil and generous supplies of food and water. Gas is subsidized in Patagonia, so fill up the tank when you get the chance.

Dodging flying rocks can be difficult and many potential damages are not covered under the insurance policies offered by rental agencies. Those that aren't must be paid out of pocket. Be sure to check with the agency about coverage and deductibles.

### Road Rules

The law requires that headlights are on during daylight hours. Respect speed limits: 65km/h to 80km/h is a safe maximum speed.

Sheep *always* have the right of way. While most will scurry out of the way, some are not so quick. Guanacos and ñandús are another potential hazard. Slow down, give them distance and watch out for unsigned *guardaguanados* (cattle guards).

### Driving Etiquette

Signal hello to oncoming drivers by flashing your headlights or raising an index finger with your hand on the steering wheel. Unwritten rule: stop to help anyone stranded on the side of the road. There's no 'roadside assistance' here and mobile phones are useless in the mountains and along most west–east stretches. Along windy roads, toot your horn before barreling through blind curves.

comparatively tame. The season lasts from June until October, with the **National Ski Festival** in the second week of September. Summer activity options include hiking, riding the chairlift and horseback riding.

Equipment can be rented on site or at sport shops in Esquel, including Tierra (p466). Minibuses can take you to La Hoya from Esquel lodgings for AR\$17 per person; taxis may be a better deal for groups.

### Cholila

Butch Cassidy, the Sundance Kid and Ethel Place tried settling down and making an honest living (see the boxed text, p472) near this

quiet farming community outside the north-east entrance to Parque Nacional Los Alerces. Bruce Chatwin's travel classic *In Patagonia* recounts the tale. The bandits' partially restored homestead is just off RP 71 at Km 21, near the turnoff to the Casa de Piedra teahouse, 8km north of Cholila. Cholila's enthusiastic **Casa de Informes** (☎ 02945-498040/131; RP 71, at RP 15; ☹ summer only) has a helpful regional map and will gladly point you in the right direction.

Transportes Esquel buses from Esquel to El Bolsón pass close enough for a fleeting glimpse of the cabin on the west side of the highway, but visitors with their own vehi-

When another car approaches, slow down and move to the side of the road to avoid stones flying out from under the wheels. For maximum security, consider adding a windshield screen for protection. Another recommendation is to cover headlights with transparent, industrial-strength tape to minimize the cracking should a stone hit.

Flash your headlights to signal a desire to pass. The car in front should slow down to let you by. If you're being overtaken, move over and slow down until the cloud of dust has settled. If you need to stop, don't slam on the brakes, an act that will send the car skidding along the road. Instead, slow down and use the gears to lower the speeds until you can safely park on the side the road.

### Letting Someone Else Deal with It

A group of travel agencies ([www.corredorpatagonico.com](http://www.corredorpatagonico.com) in Spanish) coordinates two-day minivan transport along RN 40 from El Calafate to Bariloche, via El Chaltén, Perito Moreno and Los Antiguos. Service follows fair weather, from mid-October/November to early April, depending on demand and road conditions. Some departures may include a stop at Cueva de las Manos.

Based in Bariloche at Periko's hostel (p411), **Overland Patagonia** ([www.overlandpatagonia.com](http://www.overlandpatagonia.com)) offers trips down to El Calafate: AR\$950 for the four-day trip, including lodging. **Corredor Patagónico** ([www.corredorpatagonico.com](http://www.corredorpatagonico.com) in Spanish) offers the same trip in two days (AR\$365 to AR\$405 including lodging) or four days (AR\$570 to AR\$590 including lodging). The company also stretches the trip to six relaxed days and charges AR\$2270, including food and stays on *estancias*. Both companies offer several variations on these trips. Corredor Patagónico tailors one of its trips to seniors.

**Chaltén Travel** (☎ 011-4326-7282; [www.chaltentravel.com](http://www.chaltentravel.com); Sarmiento 559, piso 8, Buenos Aires) runs northbound two-day shuttles, leaving at 8am from El Calafate, with accommodation in Perito Moreno. Southbound three-day shuttles leave Bariloche at 6:45am on odd-numbered days, with accommodations in Perito Moreno and El Chaltén. Buses stop in Los Antiguos as well. For the whole trip, prices start at AR\$970 per person (including accommodation). It's possible to hop on and off along the route, but space on the next shuttle is neither reservable nor guaranteed. Chaltén also has branches in El Calafate (☎ 02902-492212/480), El Chaltén (☎ 02962-493092) and Bariloche (☎ 02944-423809).

For a more personal approach, small, multilingual outfitters **Ruta 40** (☎ 0297-446-5337; [www.ruta-40.com](http://www.ruta-40.com); Comodoro Rivadavia) and **Las Loicas** (☎ 02963-490272, 02963-15-421-3194; <http://lasloicas.com>; Lago Posadas) organize well-informed and personalized trips on RN 40 with opportunities to stop and explore further.

cle or time to spare can stop for a look at the overlapping log construction, typical of North America but unusual in this region. Without museum status, it remains locked, although the congenial caretaker, Daniel Sepúlveda, is open to showing visitors around. Close any gates you open and ask permission from the caretaker before looking around or taking photographs.

Afterwards, you can follow the signs for 1km to the Calderón family's **Casa de Piedra** (☎ 02945-498056; RP 71, Km 20; ☹ Dec-Mar), a beautiful stone farmhouse offering tea, sweets and preserves, as well as information. The hospitable Calderóns, of Spanish-Welsh-English-

French-Basque-Mapuche descent, let double rooms for around AR\$140 per person with breakfast. Call ahead to let them know you are coming.

To return to Esquel, if driving, you can follow unpaved RP 71 north for 20km to the pavement at the first crossroads, and continue 116km on paved RN 40 back to Esquel. On the way you will pass the **Museo Leleque** (☎ in Buenos Aires 011-4326-5156; [www.benetton.com/patagonia](http://www.benetton.com/patagonia); RN 40, Km 1440; ☹ 11am-5pm Thu-Tue Mar-Dec, to 7pm Jan & Feb), which has many Mapuche artifacts and narrates the history of the region from the perspective of the Benetton family.

**BUTCH & SUNDANCE'S PATAGONIAN REFUGE** *Daniel Buck & Anne Meadows*

The only standing relics of Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid's South American adventure are the rough-hewn log ranch buildings by the Río Blanco in Chubut's Cholíla Valley.

Butch and Sundance – and Sundance's chum, Ethel Place – arrived in the Cholíla Valley in 1901, at a time when Argentina was attracting immigrants from all over the world and its government was eager to settle the sparsely populated southern territories. US newspapers rhapsodized about 'a land of wild apples and wild strawberries, of hill and dale, of beautiful scenery, of pastoral and mineral wealth.' Best of all, the land was free.

By all accounts, Butch and Sundance had every intention of giving up their delinquent ways and settling permanently in Cholíla. They bought livestock, filed land petitions and built a ranch. In 1902 Butch wrote to a friend in Utah that 'the country is first class.' They had '300 cattle, 1500 sheep, and 28 good saddle horses,' and would soon be sending cattle over the Andes to a slaughterhouse in Chile.

Another hint of what their life was like comes from Primo Capraro, a Bariloche architect who spent a night with the trio in 1904 at their ranch. He later recalled: 'The house was simply furnished and exhibited a certain painstaking tidiness, a geometric arrangement of things, pictures with cane frames, wallpaper made of clippings from American magazines, and many beautiful weapons and lassos. The men were tall, slender, laconic, and nervous, with intense gazes. The lady, who was reading, was well-dressed.'

Their neighbors, some of whose descendants still live in the valley, were from Chile, Wales, England, Ireland, Scotland and Texas. One of the Texans had even been a sheriff back home, but among expatriate settlers, amity was the rule. When the territorial governor came through on an inspection tour, Butch and Sundance hosted a party. The governor danced with Ethel while Sundance played guitar.

Their idyll was smashed in early 1905, when they were wrongly suspected of a bank robbery in Río Gallegos and forced to flee. A few months later, as a departing thumb-in-the-eye, they held up a bank in Villa Mercedes, near Mendoza. Ethel returned to the US and vanished, while Butch and Sundance migrated to Chile and Bolivia. In November 1908, after a couple of years working in a mine camp, they robbed another mine's payroll and died in a shootout with a Bolivian military patrol.

**TREVELIN**

☎ 02945 / pop 6400 / elev 735m

Historic Trevelin (treh-veh-lehn), from the Welsh for town (*tre*) and mill (*velin*), is the only community in interior Chubut with a notable Welsh character. Easygoing and postcard-pretty, this pastoral village makes a tranquil lodging alternative to the much busier Esquel (remember, everything is relative here), or an enjoyable day trip for tea. The surrounding countryside is ripe for exploration.

**Orientation**

Just 22km south of Esquel via paved RN 259, Trevelin's urban plan is unusual for an Argentine city: at the north end of town, eight streets radiate like the spokes of a wheel from Plaza Coronel Fontana. The principal thoroughfare, Av San Martín, is the southward extension of RN 259, which forks west 50km to the Chilean border and Futaleufú, 12km beyond.

**Information**

**Banco del Chubut** (cnr Av San Martín & Brown) Just south of the plaza, with an ATM.

**Gales al Sur** (☎ 480427; trevelin@galesal-sur.com.ar; Patagonia 186) Esquel buses stop at this travel agency, which arranges tours.

**Post office** (Av San Martín) Just south of the plaza.

**Telefónica** (cnr Av San Martín & El Malacara) *Locutorio*, next to Gales al Sur. Open late, with dial-up internet.

**Tourist office** (☎ 480120; www.trevelin.org in Spanish; Plaza Fontana; ☎ 8am-9pm) Helpful, with a free town map, information on local hikes and English-speaking staff.

**Sights & Activities**

The **Museo Regional Molino Viejo** (☎ 02945-480189; cnr 25 de Mayo & Molino Viejo; admission AR\$2; ☎ 11am-8:30pm Dec-Mar, to 6:30pm Apr-Nov) occupies the restored remains of a 1922 grain mill and is stuffed with interesting historic artifacts. It's a couple of blocks east of the plaza, at the end of 25 de Mayo.

Horse lovers pay their respects at **Tumba de Malacara** (☎ 480108; admission AR\$10; Malacara s/n; ☎ 10am-8pm), the monument holding the remains of a brave horse whose swift retreat saved its owner's hide. As the story goes, town founder John Evans escaped with Malacara from murder-bent Araucanians, who were retaliating for an attack by the Argentine army during the Conquista del Desierto. It's two blocks northeast of Plaza Coronel Fontana. Here there's also the **Cartief Taid**, a museum replica of Evans' home.

**Festivals & Events**

An **artisan market** fills Plaza Coronel Fontana on Sundays in summer and on alternate Sundays the rest of the year. On March 19, the **Aniversario de Trevelin** celebrates the founding of the city. The biggest Welsh celebration of the year is the multilingual **Eisteddfod**, a festival that takes place at the end of October and sees bards competing in song and poetry. Other dates that bring out the Welsh flag include July 28, the date the first ship with 143 Welsh pilgrims docked in Patagonia in 1865. Every April 30, the community commemorates its decision to choose Argentine residency. November 25 marks the discovery of the valley with a flurry of afternoon teas and an evening concert.

**Sleeping**

**Camping Policial** (Costanera Río Percy & Holdich; campsites per person AR\$6; ☎ closed winter) These fine, grassy sites offer good shade. From Av San Martín 600 block, walk two blocks west on Coronel Holdich and turn left down the gravel road. The Esquel bus goes beyond the plaza and stops at the intersection of Holdich and San Martín.

**our pick** **Casaverde Hostel** (☎ 480091, 02945-15-691535; www.casaverdehostel.com.ar; Los Alerces s/n; dm HI member/nonmember AR\$30/35, s/d with bathroom AR\$105/120, 6-person cabin AR\$350; ☎ ) A convivial retreat perched above town, Casaverde is homey and helpful, but the secret's out, so book ahead! Guests relax in the spacious rooms and sunny common areas, and wake up to breakfast (AR\$12) with bottomless mugs of real coffee, homemade bread and jams. This is the place for bike rentals (AR\$8 per hour), Spanish classes and fly-fishing lessons. It's a 10-minute walk from the plaza, off Av Fontana.

**Cabañas Oregon** (☎ 480408; www.oregontrevelin.com.ar in Spanish; cnr Av San Martín & JM Thomas; 4-person cabin AR\$150) Scattered around an apple or-

chard on the south side of town, these appealing log cabins come with kitchen, TV and private bathroom.

**Hosteria Casa de Piedra** (☎ 480357; www.casade piedra-trevelin.com in Spanish; Brown 244; d AR\$220, 5-person apt AR\$320, 6-person cabin AR\$320) This new stone lodge is a haven for anglers. A huge stone fireplace, tribal motifs and rustic touches create a warm ambience. Luis, the enthusiastic owner, offers fly-fishing trips and worthwhile excursions to rural home stays in Palena, Chile.

**Cabañas Wilson** (☎ 480803; www.wilsonpatagonia.com.ar; RP 259 at RP 71; 2-/4-/6-person cabins AR\$240/260/280) Savor the serenity surrounding these newly built wood-and-brick cabins on the edge of town. Administration is friendly and the cabins include daily cleaning service, extra covers and a barbecue deck.

**Eating**

Just as visitors to Trelew flock to Gaiman, so visitors to Esquel head to Trevelin for Welsh tea. Tea houses are typically open from 3pm to 8pm. Often the portions are big enough to share – ask first if it's OK. In low season, confirm hours before heading out from Esquel.

**Nain Maggie** (☎ 480232; Perito Moreno 179; tea service AR\$30; ☎ 10am-12:30pm & 3:30-8pm) Javier de la Fuente recreates granny's recipes in this, Trevelin's oldest teahouse. Though it occupies a modern building, Nain Maggie maintains high traditional standards. Along with a bottomless pot, there's outstanding cream pie, *torta negra* and scones hot from the oven.

**Las Mutisias** (☎ 480165; Av San Martín 170; tea service AR\$24) The only other teahouse where everything is reliably homemade.

**Getting There & Away**

The **bus terminal** (cnr Roca & RN 40), located on a corner of the wheel, has buses to Comodoro Rivadavia (AR\$53) at 11:30pm Sunday through Friday. **Gales del Sur** (☎ 480427; RN 259) has hourly buses to Esquel (AR\$3, 30 minutes). Buses cross the border to Chile's Futaleufú (AR\$18, one hour) on Mondays and Fridays at 8:30am and 6pm. Buses go to the village of Carrenleufú (AR\$24, two hours), just before the border crossing to Palena in Chile, on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays at 10:30am.

**PARQUE NACIONAL LOS ALERCES**

☎ 02945

This collection of spry creeks, verdant mountains and mirror lakes resonates as

unadulterated Andes. The real attraction, however, is the alerce tree (*Fitzroya cupressoides*), one of the longest-living species on the planet, with specimens that have survived up to 4000 years. Following the acclaim of well-known parks further north and south, most hikers miss this gem, which makes your visit here all the more enjoyable.

Resembling California's giant sequoia, the alerce flourishes in middle Patagonia's temperate forests, growing only about one centimeter every twenty years. Individual specimens of this beautiful tree can reach over 4m in diameter and exceed 60m in height. Like the giant sequoia, it has suffered over-exploitation because of its valuable timber. West of Esquel, this 2630-sq-km park pro-

tections some of the largest alerce forests that still remain.

### Environment & Climate

Hugging the eastern slopes of the Andes, the peaks of Parque Nacional Los Alerces reach up to 2300m, bearing glaciers whose retreat formed the series of nearly pristine lakes and streams below. These lakes all drain southward via the huge hydroelectricity reservoir of Lago Amutui Quimei into the Río Futaleufú, which flows westward into Chile. The area offers beautiful vistas and excellent fishing.

Because the Andes are relatively low here, westerly storms deposit nearly 3m of rain annually. The park's eastern sector, though, is much drier. Winter temperatures average

2°C, but can be much colder. The summer mean high reaches 24°C, but evenings are usually cool.

### Plants & Animals

While its wild backcountry supports the seldom-seen huemul (Andean deer) and other wildlife, Los Alerces functions primarily as a trove of botanical riches. Besides the alerce, other important coniferous evergreens and deciduous broadleaf trees characterize the dense Valdivian forest, such as ñire, coihue and lenga. Most of the larger broadleaf tree species in the park belong to the genus *Nothofagus* (commonly known as southern beech), abiding only in the southern hemisphere. Hikers will find an almost impenetrable undergrowth of chusquea, a solid bamboo, coniferous cypress and the aromatic Chilean incense cedar. Another interesting species is the arrayán, whose foliage and peeling cinnamon-colored bark bear resemblance to the madrone (*Arbutus menziesii*) of the western US coastal states and British Columbia.

### Information

During the high season (Christmas to Semana Santa) foreigners pay AR\$12 admission. In Villa Futaleufquen you'll find the **Intendencia** (park office; ☎ 471015/20; ⌚ 8am–9pm in summer, 9am–4pm rest of year), where rangers have details about hiking, camping and guided excursions. Get your fishing permits here. The headquarters also house the Museo y Centro del Interpretación, a natural-history museum. The visitor center at the northern end of the park is only open December through February.

### Activities

As well as sailing and hiking, travel agencies in Esquel offer fishing, canoeing, mountain-biking, snorkeling and horseback-riding trips.

### SAILING

Traditionally, **Circuito Lacustre** is Los Alerces' most popular excursion and involves sailing from Puerto Limonao up Lago Futaleufquen, then through the narrow channel of the Río Arrayanes to Lago Verde.

Low water levels now make it necessary to hike the short distance between Puerto Mermoud, at the north end of Lago Futaleufquen, and Puerto Chucac on Lago Menéndez. Launches from Puerto Chucac handle the second segment of the trip (1½

hours) to the nature trail **El Alerzal**, the most accessible stand of alerces. Another option (recommended) is to arrive to Puerto Chucac via a 1500m trail that crosses the bridge over Río Arrayanes: the scenery is well worthwhile.

The launch remains docked for over an hour at El Alerzal trailhead, sufficient for an unhurried hike around the loop trail that passes **Lago Cisne** and an attractive waterfall to end up at **El Abuelo** (Grandfather), a 57m-tall, 2600-year-old alerce.

From Puerto Limonao, the excursion costs AR\$110; from Puerto Chucac it's AR\$85. Departures are at 10am from Limonao and noon from Chucac, returning to Chucac at 5pm and to Limonao at 7pm. In summer, purchase tickets in Esquel to ensure a seat.

### HIKING

Because of fire hazard, authorities allow camping only at authorized campsites. Even for short treks, it is compulsory to sign in at the one of the ranger stations before heading out.

Day hikes can be undertaken from several interpretive trails located near **Lago Futaleufquen**. The only trekking option is the 25km trail from **Puerto Limonao** along the south shore of Futaleufquen to **Refugio Lago Krüger** (p476), which can be done in a long day, or broken up by camping at **Playa Blanca**. Boat excursions from Puerto Limonao to Lago Krüger cost AR\$70 per person.

For longer hikes, see Lonely Planet's *Trekking in the Patagonian Andes*.

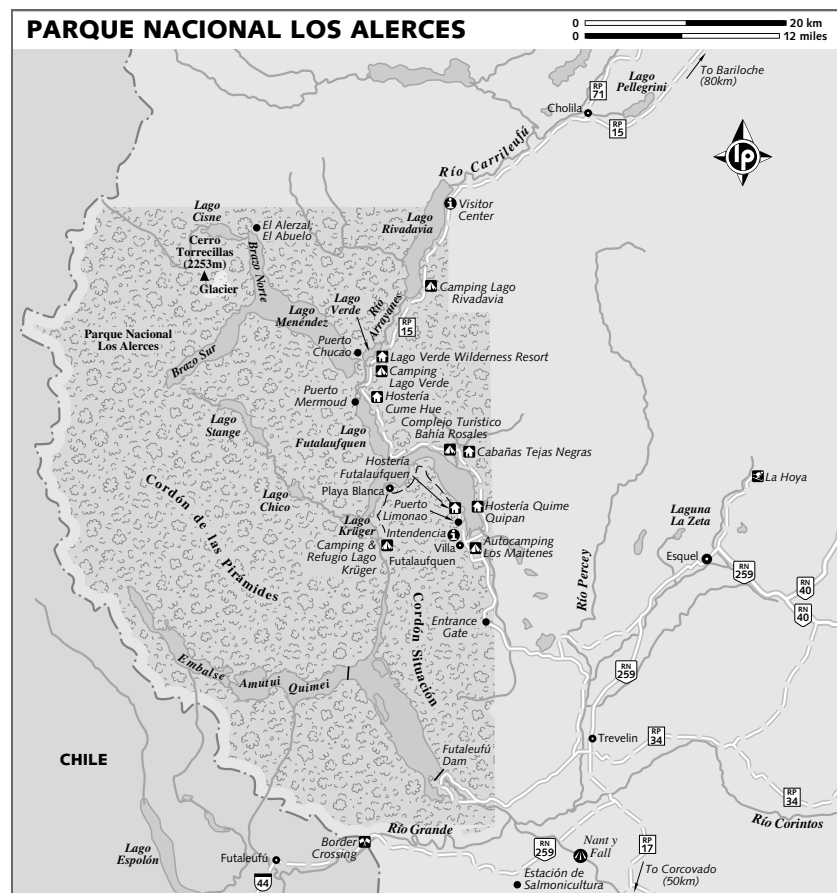
### Sleeping & Eating

En route to the park, watch for roadside signs advertising ideal picnic goods: homemade bread, delicious Chubut cheese, fresh fruit and Welsh sweets. In Villa Futaleufquen there are a couple of basic grocery stores and a summer-only restaurant, but it's best to bring your own provisions. The following accommodations are listed from north to south, not by price.

### CAMPING

Los Alerces has several full-service, drive-in campgrounds, all of which have hot showers, grocery stores and restaurants on-site or nearby. Free (no services) and semi-organized campsites exist near most of these fee sites.

**Camping Lago Rivadavia** (☎ 454381; adult/child AR\$14/7) Idyllic spots at Lago Rivadavia's south end, sheltered in the trees with picnic tables



and a boat launch. There's an electricity hookup too. It's 42km north of the Villa.

**Camping Lago Verde** (☎ 471015/20, ext 23; camping per person AR\$20, 6-person cabin AR\$1000) With deluxe remodeled cabins and full-service camping, this campground flanks the eastern shore of its namesake lake, 35km northwest of Villa Futalaufquen. Camping with electrical hookups is extra. Besides nearby Lago Verde Wilderness Resort, it's the only option on this tranquil lake. The resort offers dining and tea service.

**Complejo Turístico Bahía Rosales** (☎ 471044; camping per person AR\$18, 4-person refugio AR\$160, 6-person cabin AR\$360) This sprawling complex has flat campsites by the water, other lodging options and sporting facilities. At the north end of Lago Futalaufquen, it is 1.5km from the main road via a dirt path and 15km from the Intendencia.

**Autocamping Los Maitenes** (☎ 471006; per person AR\$16) On a slip of grass between the main road and the lake, these spots have lovely water views. Sites include shade, electricity hookup and fire pits, 200m from the Intendencia.

**Camping & Refugio Lago Krüger** (☎ 471015/20, ext 23; www.krugerlodge.com.ar; camping per person AR\$15, full-pension refugio per person AR\$180) This relatively isolated lakefront *refugio* (rustic shelter) complex is accessible by the 25km trail that leaves from Hostería Futalaufquen (see p475), or by launch from Puerto Limonao.

## CABAÑAS & HOSTERÍAS

With a group, cabins can be an affordable option.

**Lago Verde Wilderness Resort** (☎ in Buenos Aires 011-4312-7415; www.hosteriaselaura.com; camping per person AR\$14-28, per car AR\$6, 2-/3-/4-person cabins AR\$942/1224/1507) Rustic yet ritzy, these raspy stone cabañas feature big cozy beds, panoramic forest views and earthy motifs. Anglers can rent motorized rafts with driver (AR\$471 per day) to cast from the lake's every nook and cranny. A new gourmet restaurant and teahouse caters to travelers and guests. It's 35km north of the Villa.

**Hostería Cume Hue** (☎ 450503; www.cumehue.com.ar; full board per person AR\$210; ☎ year-round) Anglers fill up this family-run inn, 27km north of the Villa. Shared bathrooms and single beds lend a somewhat monastic quality to these dull lodgings with limited electricity; to boot, all guests pay full board, which makes it somewhat overpriced. Still, the family is kind and

since there is no phone on site, the park can communicate with the *hostería* via radio to help guests with last-minute reservations.

**Cabañas Tejas Negras** (☎ 471012, 471046; tejasnegras@ciudad.com.ar; 4-/5-person cabins AR\$400/500; ☎ year-round) With a lawn like a golf course and a handful of prim A-frames, Nilda and Hector have hosted guests for 40 years. Think retreat: there are no football matches on these greens where tranquility is savored.

**Hostería Quime Quipan** (☎ 471021; www.cpatagonia.com/quimequipan in Spanish; d with/without view AR\$300/270, 6-person cabin AR\$350; ☎ Nov-Apr) In a breathtaking setting, this old-fashioned guesthouse offers pleasant but dated rooms – splurge for those with lake views. Fishing and 4WD excursions are also offered. Nonguests can dine at the cozy, sunlit restaurant (meals AR\$45), a popular après-fishing pit stop.

**Hostería Futalaufquen** (☎ 471008/9; www.brazo sur.com.ar/hosteria.htm in Spanish; d with half-pension low/high season AR\$587/800, 4-/5-person apt AR\$1200/1600) Exclusive and elegant, this country inn is on the quieter western shore of the lake, 4.5km north of the Villa at the end of the road. It offers nine well-appointed doubles and three log cabins (without kitchens). Activities – from kayaking to rappelling – abound; collapse by the fire afterwards with a plate of dessert. The teahouse and superb dining room Lahuan are open to the public. Reservations can be made at Av Alvear 442 in Esquel.

## Getting There & Away

For information on getting to/from the park, see p469.

## GOBERNADOR COSTA

☎ 02945 / pop 2000

When you find a town where a child snaps the tourist's picture (and not the reverse), you've discovered something of an anomaly. This rusted little cattle town abuts the yawning stretch of RN 40 between Esquel and Río Mayo, at the intersection of RP 20 for Sarmiento and Comodoro Rivadavia. Some 20km west of town, RP 19 leads to **Lago General Vintter** and several smaller blue-ribbon lakes near the Chilean border; camping is possible along the shores.

Traveler services are few but reasonable. On the edge of fields, **Camping Municipal** (per person AR\$6) has electricity and hot water. The motel-style **Mi Refugio** (☎ 491087; Av Roca s/n; s/d/tr/q AR\$50/75/95/120) has dark but clean rooms with

central heating and TV. The downstairs grill is friendly and its food filling. If it's booked out, check **Residencial El Jairo** (☎ 02945-15-680414; cnr San Martín & Sarmiento; per person AR\$30), with basic rooms and special rates for families.

The **bus terminal** (Av Roca s/n) is next to Mi Refugio. Buses go to Esquel (AR\$22), continuing to Bariloche, at 3:45am every day except for Saturday. For Comodoro Rivadavia (AR\$53), buses leave at 11:30pm every day except Sunday. To reach Río Mayo, most buses skip this portion of bumpy (and boring) RN 40 by taking RP 20 south, paralleling Río Senguer to the Río Mayo cutoff.

## RÍO MAYO

☎ 02903 / pop 3500 humans, 800,000 sheep

The national capital of sheepshearing is a surprisingly humdrum place, save for the petroleum workers and waylaid gauchos practicing their wolf-whistles on unsuspecting female *turistas*. This barren pit stop is 200km south of Gobernador Costa, 135km north of Perito Moreno and 274km west of Comodoro Rivadavia.

The **Casa de Cultura** (☎ 420400; Ejército Argentino s/n; ☎ 9am-noon & 3-6pm) houses a tourist office, with information on local mountain biking. The town website (www.riomayo.gov.ar in Spanish) has some useful information for visitors. **Banco del Chubut** (cnr Yrigoyen & Argentina) has an ATM.

January's **Festival Nacional de la Esquila** features merino wool quality competitions and even guanaco shearing. But the main event is the long-anticipated crowning of the national sheepshearing queen.

**Camping Municipal** (☎ 420400; Av E Argentino s/n; per vehicle AR\$15) flanks the river. Run-down but respectable, the four-room **Aurora** (☎ 420193; Fontana 750; d without bathroom AR\$60) is clean and cared for by a sweet-natured matron. It's around the corner from the YPF station.

The following lodgings both offer meals, otherwise the YPF is a good bet for a quick sandwich and coffee. Funky and rambling **El Viejo Kavadonga** (☎ 420020; San Martín 573; per person with/without bathroom AR\$70/50) features rooms with good down covers but varying in quality. Its coveted feature is the orange vinyl bar. **Hotel Akatá** (☎ 420054; San Martín 640; per person AR\$70; ☎) has internet but little else; its wood-panel rooms are dark and airless.

There are daily morning services from the **bus terminal** (☎ 420174; cnr Fontana & Irigoyen) to Comodoro Rivadavia (AR\$24, four hours) and

Sarmiento (AR\$14) at 6am and 11am. Buses to Coyhaique, Chile (AR\$50), go on Wednesdays and Saturdays at 12:30pm. The only regularly scheduled services on the rugged stretch of RN 40 to Perito Moreno are summer-only backpacker shuttles (see p478).

## PERITO MORENO

☎ 02963 / pop 3500

Those who confuse this dull agricultural village with the jaw-dropping national park of the same name or the glacier near El Calafate might wonder why the only tourist attraction is cruising the strip on Saturday night. Perito Moreno is a brief stopover en route to the more inviting Andean oasis of Los Antiguos. It also makes a good launch pad for visiting Cueva de las Manos and Parque Nacional Perito Moreno. The main drag, San Martín, leads north to RP 43 and south to RN 40; it's 128km south to Bajo Caracoles and 135km north to Río Mayo.

The town's glory came in 1898, when explorer Perito Moreno challenged Chile's border definition of '*divortum aquarum continental*' (which claimed the headwaters of Pacific-flowing rivers as Chilean territory) by rerouting the Río Fénix, which flows through town, to Atlantic-bound Río Deseado. The river and the area remained Argentine, and the town took his name.

## Information

**Banco de la Nación** (cnr San Martín & Perito Moreno)

**Banco de Santa Cruz** (cnr San Martín & Rivadavia) has an ATM.

**CTC** (Perito Moreno 1032) Cheap internet access.

**Hospital Distrital** (☎ 432040; Colón 1237)

**Post office** (cnr JD Perón & Belgrano)

**Telefónica** (cnr San Martín & Saavedra)

**Tourist office** (☎ 432732; turismoperitomorenito@yahoo.com.ar; San Martín 1766; ☎ 7am-11:30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-3pm Sat & Sun) There is also a desk at the bus terminal.

**Zoien** (☎ 432207; cnr San Martín & Saavedra) Travel agency with trips to Cueva de las Manos in high season.

## Tours

The experienced **GuanaCondor Tours** (☎ 432117, 02963-15-452-6224, 02963-15-452-6224; jarinauta@santacruz.com.ar; Perito Moreno 1087; ☎ 10am-noon & 4-8pm Mon-Wed & Sat, 5-8pm Sun) runs tours to Cueva de las Manos (AR\$120 per person), accessing the park via the former Estancia Los Toldos, with a challenging hike that adds considerably to the experience. Ask about trips to Monte Zeballos, a high mesa

with excellent views, and an overnight trip to Paso Tehuelche that's in the works.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Camping Municipal** (Laguna de los Cisnes, off Mariano Moreno; sites AR\$30, plus AR\$5 per person, 4-person cabañas per person AR\$100) The cheapest option for backpackers is this campground with rustic cabins on the south side of town. It's shaded by breezy poplars and has hot showers. The *cabañas*, while private, are cramped.

**Hotel Americano** (☎ 432074; San Martín 1327; s/d/tr AR\$60/90/120) Cozy and family-run, Americano also has a decent restaurant. Rooms vary widely – some lack windows, others can be quite cozy – so ask to see a few before deciding.

**Hotel Belgrano** (☎ 432019; San Martín 1001; s/d/tr AR\$90/140/180) This big, boxy corner hotel has spacious cement rooms with decent mattresses but not much ambience. Most folks shuffle in during the wee hours from Chaltén Travel shuttles. The downstairs restaurant serves good coffee and breakfast is AR\$8.

**Posada el Caminante** (☎ 432204; Rivadavia 937; s/d/tr AR\$100/140/180) The best bet in town, Señora Ethiel's inn fills up fast. This welcoming hostess has four spacious rooms with comfy beds, heating and private bathrooms. An abundant breakfast (AR\$9 extra) is worthwhile, especially during fruit season.

There are a couple of well-stocked *panaderías* (bakeries) and grocery stores along San Martín.

## Getting There & Away

**LADE** (☎ 432055; San Martín 1065) flies to El Calafate, Río Gallegos, Río Grande and Ushuaia.

The pristine bus terminal sits behind the YPF rotunda at the northern entrance to town. Taxis (AR\$4) provide the only transport between here and the center, other than a flat 15-minute walk. Buses leave daily at 10:30am and 1:40am for Los Antiguos (AR\$13, 40 minutes), and at 1:50am for Comodoro Rivadavia (AR\$49, five hours) via Caleta Olivia (AR\$42, four hours). Buses to El Calafate (AR\$153, 19 hours) via RN 3 go at 5:05pm, stopping at Caleta Olivia.

Several shuttle services also offering excursions serve travelers on RN 40. From November to April, **Chaltén Travel** (☎ /fax in El Calafate 2902-492-212/492-480; www.chaltentravel.com) goes north to Bariloche (11 hours), departing from Hotel Belgrano in Perito Moreno at 8pm on even-

numbered days. Shuttles leave Hotel Belgrano at 8am to head south to El Chaltén (11 hours) on odd-numbered days. Year-round, **Las Loicas** (☎ 02963-490272, 0297-15-421-3194; http://lasloicas.com in Spanish) leaves Perito Moreno on Thursdays at 6pm for Bajo Caracoles (AR\$40, two hours) and Lago Posadas (AR\$50, four hours). **Condor Patagonico** (☎ 02944-525488) continues north to Bariloche (AR\$157) in connection with shuttles coming from the south. For more information on all options, see p471.

## LOS ANTIGUOS

☎ 02963 / pop 2500

Situated on the windy shores of Lago Buenos Aires, the agricultural oasis of Los Antiguos is framed with rows of Lombardy poplars sheltering *chacras* (small independent farms) of cherries, strawberries, apples, apricots and peaches. Before the arrival of Europeans, aging Tehuelche frequented this 'banana belt' – the town's name is a near-literal translation of the Tehuelche name 'I-Keu-khon,' meaning Place of the Elders. Travelers come to cross the border into Chile, but getting here via RN 40 can be an adventure in itself.

Volcán Hudson's 1991 eruption covered the town in ash, but farms have bounced back. In summer **Lago Buenos Aires**, South America's second-biggest lake, is warm enough for a brisk swim. The stunning **Río Jeinemeni** is a favored spot for trout and salmon fishing.

## Orientation

Los Antiguos occupies the delta formed by Río Los Antiguos and Río Jeinemeni, which constitutes the border with Chile. Most services are on or near east–west Av 11 de Julio, which heads west to the Chilean frontier at Chile Chico, the region's most convenient border crossing. Perito Moreno and RN 40 are 60km to the east.

## Information

**Banco de Santa Cruz** (Av 11 de Julio 531) Has a 24-hour ATM.

**Ciber Patagonia** (cnr Patagonia Argentina & Fierro) Open late for internet access.

**Locutorio** (Alameda 436) Also has internet.

**Mario Rodríguez** (☎ 0229-63-491123, 02966-15-514923) Spanish-speaking local fishing guide.

**Post office** (Gregores 19)

**Tourist information office** (☎ 491261; www.losantiguos.gov.ar in Spanish; Av 11 de Julio 446; ☎ 8am–8pm) Helpful, with a map of town and farms selling fresh produce.

## Festivals & Events

The fun **Fiesta de la Cereza** (Cherry Festival), featuring rodeos and live music, celebrates its favorite crop during the second weekend of January. Artisan goods are sold and *peñas folklóricas* (Argentine folk music concerts) at private farms go on all night long – see the tourist information office for more information.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Camping Municipal** (☎ 491265; RP 43; camping/cabins per person AR\$4/40) Windbreaks help considerably at this lakeshore site 1.5km east of town. The windowless cabins have dorm-style accommodations, and hot showers are available in the evening.

**Albergue Padilla** (☎ 491140; San Martín 44; s/d/tr AR\$30/70/90) Chaltén Travel shuttles deposit lodgers at this family-run institution after dark. Dorms share bathrooms (with plenty of hot water) and an attractive cooking area. In summer ask about cherry picking on the

family farm. They have RN 40 shuttle tickets and the latest Chilean border crossing and ferry details.

**Cabañas Rincon de los Poetas** (☎ 491051; Patagonia Argentina 226; d/tr/q AR\$100/120/130) These snug wooden cabins equipped with kitchenettes are nothing fancy, but they prove good value for couples and families. It's located two blocks from the center.

**Hotel Argentino** (☎ 491132; Av 11 de Julio 850; s/d AR\$85/115) Modern rooms all feature private bathroom and TV, and hearty meals satisfy a regular crowd of farmers, gauchos and businessmen.

**Hostería Antigua Patagonia** (☎ 491038; www.antiguapatagonia.com.ar in Spanish; RP 43 Acceso Este; s/d AR\$190/230) This plush lakefront complex is decked out in rustic touches. Rooms feature four-poster beds and wooden trunks, though the snuggest spot is by the stone fireplace. Diversions include a telescope, sauna, gym, bikes and billiards. Meals feature local lamb

## ESTANCIAS IN PATAGONIA

Most assume *estancias* are all about livestock, but these offbeat offerings prove otherwise.

### A Wealth of Wildlife

- Meet the neighbors – that would be the penguins, seabirds and elephant seals – around Península Valdés' **Estancia Rincón Chico** (p442).
- Reel in the big one at the exclusive, world-renowned trout mecca **Estancia Güer Aike** (p464), near Río Gallegos.
- View the diverse fauna of Magellanic penguins, sea lions, guanacos and pumas at **Hostería Monte León** (p460).

### Breathtaking Beauty

- Luxuriate among glaciers, lakes and the ragged Mt Fitz Roy in the exclusive **Hostería Estancia Helsingfors** (p497).
- Gallop the rugged splendor surrounding Parque Nacional Perito Moreno at the hospitable **Estancia Menelik** (p482).
- Hike narrow canyons and shout from the precipitous plateaus at **Estancia Telken** (p480).

### Just Like Indiana Jones

- Travel back to the Pleistocene and explore 84 caves with prehistoric rock art at **Estancia La María** (p460), near Puerto San Julián.
- Trek to Unesco World Heritage site Cueva de las Manos from **Hostería Cueva de las Manos** (p480), via the serpentine red-rock canyon of Río de las Pinturas.

### The Bargain Bin

- Grab your zzzs in a bunk bed and save some bucks: Estancias Menelik (p482), La María (p460) and Casa de Piedra (p481) all offer affordable *refugio* (rustic shelter) lodgings.

on a spit and fresh produce. It's 2km east of town, off the road to Perito Moreno.

**Agua Grande** (☎ 491165; Av 11 de Julio 871; mains AR\$25) The best restaurant in town, offering a daily special and menu of pastas, meats and sandwiches.

### Getting There & Away

The gradual paving of RN 40 and subsequent future services will keep transport options in flux, so get current information.

Various bus companies go to nearby Perito Moreno (AR\$13, 40 minutes) at 6am, 3pm and 4pm. **Sportman** (☎ 491175; Senador Molina 690) has buses to Río Gallegos (AR\$110, 16 hours) and Comodoro Rivadavia (AR\$58, six hours) at 4pm daily. Ask about intermediary stops. **La Unión** (☎ 491078; cnr Av 11 de Julio & San Martín) buses head to Comodoro Rivadavia (AR\$58) at 5:45am and 3pm Monday to Saturday and 4pm on Sunday.

**Transportes Padilla** (☎ 491140; San Martín 44) crosses the border (open 8am to 9pm or 10pm daily, often closed noon to 2pm) to Chile Chico (AR\$4) several times daily.

From November to March, **Chaltén Travel** (www.chaltentravel.com) goes to El Chaltén (AR\$160, 13 hours) on even-numbered days at 9am, stopping first in Perito Moreno. See p471 for northbound schedules.

Ferry **El Pilchero** (☎ in Chile 56-67-411864) crosses Lago Buenos Aires daily from Chile Chico to Puerto Ibañez (CH\$4000, vehicles CH\$23,500 per meter, three to six hours), weather depending, on Monday at 8am and 4:30pm, Thursday at 3:30pm, Friday at 5:30pm and Sunday at 2:30pm. Alternatively, it's possible to continue overland around the lake's southern shore to Carretera Austral and Coyhaique.

### ESTANCIA TELKEN

A highlight of traveling along this stretch, **Estancia Telken** (☎ 02963-432079; telkenpatagonia@yahoo.com.ar; RN 40; camping per person/tent AR\$15, d AR\$240; ☞ Oct-Apr) offers a welcoming repose in pretty countryside. This 1915 working sheep and horse ranch, 25km south of Perito Moreno, is run by the charming Coco and Petti Nauta. Coco's family is descended from Dutch settlers, while Petti hails from a New Zealand clan and spins many a yarn about ranch life. Delicious, abundant meals are served family-style, and English and Dutch are spoken. Recently two new doubles have been added.

There are about 210 sq km of horseback riding and hiking possibilities, including a worthwhile meander along a creek bed up to the basalt plateau **Meseta de Lago Buenos Aires**. Ask Petti to take you to **Cueva de Piedra**, a small cave snuggled in a silent valley of guanacos, eagles and the occasional armadillo.

Controversial gold mining allowed by government concession has closed **Cañadón Arroyo del Feo**, a deep red-rock river canyon that narrows into steep ravines, to the public. This used to be an excellent opportunity to see well-preserved cave art that has been around for approximately 7000 years.

GuanaCondor Tours in Perito Moreno (p477) organizes trips.

### CUEVA DE LAS MANOS

The incredible rock art of **Cueva de las Manos** (Cave of the Hands; admission AR\$50; ☞ 9am-7pm) was proclaimed a Unesco World Heritage site in 1999. Dating from about 7370 BC, these polychrome rock paintings cover recesses in the near-vertical walls with imprints of human hands as well as drawings of guanacos and, from a later period, more-abstract designs. Of around 800 images, more than 90% are of left hands; one has six fingers.

The approach is via rough but scenic provincial roads off RN 40, abutting Río de las Pinturas. Drivers should have caution: guanacos are abundant, bounding across the steppe. There are two points of access: a more direct route via Bajo Caracoles, 46km away on the south side of the river; and another from Hostería Cueva de las Manos, on the north side, via a footbridge. Guides in Perito Moreno organize day trips, usually around AR\$140 per person plus park entrance fee. Free guided walks are given every hour by knowledgeable staff. There's an information center and a basic *confitería* at the reception house near the southern entrance, but it's best to bring your own food.

On the doorstep of Argentina's best deposit of rock art, the budding **Hostería Cueva de las Manos** (☎ 02963-432730; in Buenos Aires 011-5237-4043; www.cuevadelasmanos.net; dm/d AR\$35/255; ☞ Nov-Apr), formerly Estancia Los Toldos, is a short distance off RN 40, 52km south of Perito Moreno. Guests can stay in cabins, the *hostería* or a 20-person dormitory. Rooms are plain but well appointed, with hardwood details. There's restaurant service or lunch-boxes for hikers. Guests and tour groups can

### DETOUR TO LAGO POSADAS

Want to dust off Patagonia's forgotten corners? Try adventuring to turquoise Lago Posadas and the bright blue Lago Puerreydon, flanked by fossil remains, scenic trekking and steady gusts of wind. You can arrive at the hamlet of Hipolito Yrigoyen (Lago Posadas) via RP 39, 70km west from RN 40 and Bajo Caracoles. There is camping on Lago Puerreydon (called Lago Cochrane on the Chilean side). From there, locals can direct you to area walks.

Outfitter **Las Loicas** (☎ 02963-490272, 0297-15-421-3194; http://lasloicas.com; cnr Las Lengas & Condor Andino, Lago Posadas) has the scoop on hiking, climbing and horseback riding in the greater area. It can also provide transportation, with high-season departures on Thursday from Perito Moreno (AR\$50) at 6pm and Bajo Caracoles (AR\$20) at 8pm.

approach Cueva de los Manos via a scenic but challenging hiking trail (summer only) that starts from the *hostería*, descends the canyon and crosses Río de las Pinturas.

Rustic but welcoming **Estancia Casa de Piedra** (☎ 02963-432-1990; off RN 40; camping per person AR\$25, dm AR\$60; ☞ Dec-Mar), a basic ranch 76km south of Perito Moreno, has plain rooms and allows camping. Campers can shower; all meals cost extra. It's a good spot for trekkers to hunker down: there are nearby volcanoes and the walk to Cueva de las Manos is approximately two hours via Cañon de las Pinturas. Guides can be contracted here but the trail is clear enough to go without one.

### BAJO CARACOLE

Blink and you'll miss this dusty gas stop. Little has changed since Bruce Chatwin described this hamlet as 'a crossroads of insignificant importance with roads leading all directions apparently to nowhere' in *In Patagonia* in 1975. If you're headed south, fill the tank, since it's the only reliable gas pump between Perito Moreno (128km north) and Tres Lagos (409km south). From here RP 39 heads west to Lago Posadas and the Paso Roballos to Chile.

Lodgers put on a brave face for **Hotel Bajo Caracoles** (☎ 02963-490100; d AR\$140), a severely overpriced flophouse with old gas heating units that require a watchful eye. It also stocks basic provisions and has the only private telephone in town.

Heading south, RN 40 takes a turn for the worse: it's 100km to Las Horquetas, a blip on the radar screen where RN 40, RP 27 and RP 37 intersect. From here it's another 128km southeast via RP 27 to Gobernador Gregores.

### PARQUE NACIONAL PERITO MORENO

Wild and windblown, Parque Nacional Perito Moreno is an adventurer's dream. Approaching

from the steppe, the massive snowcapped peaks of the Sierra Colorada rise like sentinels. Guanacos graze the tufted grasses, condors circle above and wind blurs the surfaces of Technicolor aquamarine and cobalt lakes. If you come here you will be among 1200 yearly visitors – that is, mostly alone. Solitude reigns and, save for services offered by local *estancias*, you are entirely on your own.

Honoring the park system's founder, this remote but increasingly popular park encompasses 1150 sq km, 310km southwest of the town of Perito Moreno. Don't confuse this gem with Parque Nacional Los Glaciares (home to the Perito Moreno glacier) further south.

The sedimentary Sierra Colorada has a painter's palette of rusty hues. Beyond the park boundary, glacier-topped summits such as 3706m Cerro San Lorenzo (the highest peak in the area) tower over the landscape. The highest peak within the park is Cerro Mié (2254m).

Besides guanacos, the park is also home to pumas, foxes, wildcats, chinchillas and huemul (Andean deer). The abundant bird population includes condors, rheas, flamingos, black-necked swans, cauquén (upland geese) and caranchos (crested cara caras). Predecessors of the Tehuelche left evidence of their presence with rock paintings in caves at Lago Burmeister.

As precipitation increases toward the west, the Patagonian steppe grasslands along the park's eastern border become sub-Antarctic forests of southern beech, lenga and coihue. Because the base altitude exceeds 900m, weather can be severe. Summer is usually comfortable, but warm clothing and proper gear are imperative in any season. The water is pure but you must bring all food and supplies.



## Information

Visitors must register at the park's information center on the eastern boundary; it's stocked with informative maps and brochures. Rangers offer a variety of guided hikes; they can also be contacted via the national parks office in Gobernador Gregores (right), where it may be possible to arrange a ride.

## Sights & Activities

Behind the information center, a one-hour interpretive trail leads to **Pinturas Rupestres**, a small number of cave paintings with interpretive signs in English. Consult park rangers for backpacking options and guided walks to the pictographs at **Casa de Piedra** on Lago Burmeister, and to **Playa de los Amonites** on Lago Belgrano, where there are fossils. Lago Burmeister also has a small museum worth a peek.

From Estancia La Oriental, it's a 2½-hour hike to the summit of 1434m **Cerro León**, from where there's a dazzling panorama. Immediately east of the summit, the volcanic outcrop of **Cerro de los Cóndores** is a nesting site for the Andes' totem species. Pumas have also been spotted here and guanacos down below.

## Sleeping & Eating

There are free campgrounds at the information center (barren and exposed, no fires allowed); at Lago Burmeister, 16km from the information center (more scenic, and well sheltered among dense lenga forest, fires allowed); and at El Rincón, 15km away (no fires). None have showers, but there are pit toilets.

**Estancia Menelik** (☎ satellite phone 011-4152-5500, in Buenos Aires 011-4836-3502; www.cielospatagonicos.com; s/d/q AR\$188/251/377, refugio per person AR\$63; ☹ Oct-Mar) With a panorama of Parque Nacional Perito Moreno, this 1920 working ranch is a prime destination for horseback riding; highlights include overnight trips to the high camp of Veranada de Jones. Accommodations range from rustic to comfortable and a new bunkhouse promises cozy changes. A seasoned staff provides courteous and hospitable service.

**Estancia La Oriental** (☎ 02962-452196, in Buenos Aires 011-4343-2366/9568; gesino@fibertel.com.ar; s/d/tr/q AR\$204/267/314/393, camping per person AR\$47; ☹ Oct-Mar; ☹) At the foot of Cerro León, at the end of the road on the north shore of Lago Belgrano, La Oriental is the ideal base camp for exploring the park's varied backcountry. Excursions

to Cerro San Lorenzo (first by car, then on foot or horseback) are a highlight. Condors are easy to sight from Cerro León's 1000m cliffs. Attention is not exactly personalized: the ranch caters to group tours. The *estancia* requires a minimum two-night stay and will not sell gasoline to nonguests. Horseback riding (nonguests/guests AR\$220/157, guide AR\$220) is available. Meals are well praised.

## Getting There & Away

Public-transport options change often; check with tourist offices in Perito Moreno, Los Antiguos and El Calafate for updates. Las Loicas (p481) can take travelers here from Perito Moreno. In summer hitchhiking is possible from the RN 40 junction, but the park is so large that getting to trailheads presents difficulties. From April to November the road becomes impassable at times. If you're driving, carry spare gas and tires.

## GOBERNADOR GREGORES

☎ 02962 / pop 2521

Gobernador Gregores is a sleepy pit stop that beckons principally when your gas tank dips toward E. But as RN 40 is paved and re-routed here, its tourist services should expand. For now, the hours of siesta remain holy.

Gregores is 60km east of RN 40 on RP 25. It's the nearest town to Parque Nacional Perito Moreno, still 200km west. It is an ideal spot to get supplies and arrange transportation. There's a **tourist office** (☎ 491192; San Martín 409; ☹ 8am-2pm Mon-Fri) and **national parks administration office** (☎ 491477; San Martín 882; 9am-4pm Mon-Fri).

Seventy kilometers west of town via RP 29, the waters of **Lago Cardiel** are well loved by anglers for blue-ribbon salmon and rainbow trout fishing. From the junction to the lake it's another 116km to **Tres Lagos**, where a jovial couple run a 24-hour YPF station, then another 123km west to El Chaltén.

Summer-only **Camping Nuestra Señora del Valle** (cnr Roca & Chile; sites AR\$4) has showers, hot water and stone grills. Hot meals (*plato del día* AR\$25) and firm beds are found at **Cañadón León** (☎ 491082; Roca 397; s/d/tr AR\$90/120/150), with 11 tidy rooms that are ample and spotless. Reserve ahead if possible. Just outside town, the pleasing **Cabañas María Abril** (☎ 491016; losluckysma@yahoo.com.ar; Av Cañadón León 608; d without bathroom AR\$80, d/tr/q AR\$120/150/250) offers tranquility with a village of A-frames in the poplars.

**LADE** (☎ 491008; Colón 544) has popular Monday flights to Perito Moreno (AR\$138), El Calafate (AR\$139), Comodoro Rivadavia (AR\$139) and Buenos Aires (AR\$373).

**Cerro San Lorenzo** (cfr San Martín & Alberdi) buses leave for Puerto San Julián (AR\$45, five hours) Monday to Saturday at 4pm. **El Pulgarcito** (☎ 491474; San Martín 704) goes to Río Gallegos (AR\$55, six hours) daily at 7am, while **El Pegaso** (☎ 491494; Pejkojovic 520) goes to Río Gallegos (AR\$62) at 4am Monday to Saturday.

## EL CHALTÉN & PARQUE NACIONAL LOS GLACIARES (NORTH)

☎ 02962

The Fitz Roy Range, with its rugged wilderness and shark-tooth summits, is the de facto mountaineering mecca of Argentina. World-class climbers consider Cerro Torre and Monte Fitz Roy epic ascents, notorious for brutal weather conditions. Occupying the northern half of Parque Nacional Los Glaciares, this sector offers numerous, well-marked trails for trekking and jaw-dropping scenery – that is, when the clouds clear.

At the entrance to the northern sector, the ragtag village of **El Chaltén** (population 600) serves the thousands of visitors who make summer pilgrimages to explore the range. The packs of dogs roaming the streets are a reminder that this is a frontier town: it was slapped together in 1985 to beat Chile to the land claim. As Argentina's youngest town, it still has to sort out details like banks (there are no ATMs), roads and zoning. Hiker services continue to evolve rapidly; the recent paving of RP 23 may improve them, even as it makes way for large-scale tourism.

El Chaltén is named for Cerro Fitz Roy's Tehuelche name, meaning 'peak of fire' or 'smoking mountain,' an apt description of the cloud-enshrouded summit. Perito Moreno and Carlos Moyano later named it after the *Beagle's* Captain FitzRoy, who navigated Darwin's expedition up the Río Santa Cruz in 1834, coming within 50km of the cordillera.

Every October 12, on the wet heels of winter with the streets mired in mud, El Chaltén celebrates **Fiesta del Pueblo**, the town anniversary, with dancing in the school gym, barbecues and live music. In the last week of February the **Fiesta Nacional de Trekking** comes to town, bringing a circus of outdoor freaks for rock-climbing, bouldering and woodcutting competitions, as well as running and

mountain-bike races. **Capilla de los Escaladores**, a simple chapel of Austrian design, memorializes the many climbers who have lost their lives to the precarious peaks since 1953.

Parque Nacional Los Glaciares is divided into geographically separate northern and southern sectors. El Calafate (p490) is the gateway town for the southern sector of the park.

## Information

Newspapers, cell phones and money exchange have yet to hit El Chaltén, but there's now mercurial satellite internet, a gas station, long-distance call centers – and land set aside for an ATM, bus terminal and cell-phone antennae. There's even a cemetery plotted out...but nobody's been buried there yet. Credit cards are virtually useless, but traveler's checks, euros and US dollars are widely accepted; ask around to find out who's changing money. Surf [www.elchalten.com](http://www.elchalten.com) for a good overview of town.

**Chaltén Travel** (☎ 493005/92; Av San Martín 724)

Books airline tickets and offers weather-dependent internet service for AR\$12 an hour.

**Municipal tourist office** (☎ 493270; comfomelchalten@yahoo.com.ar; Av MM De Güemes 21; ☹ 8am-8pm) Friendly and extremely helpful, with lodging lists and good information on town and tours. English is spoken.

**Park ranger office** (☎ 493004/24; admission free, donations welcome; ☹ 8am-7pm) Daytime buses all stop for a short bilingual orientation at this new visitor center, just before the bridge over the Río Fitz Roy. Park rangers distribute a map and town directory and do a good job of explaining the park's ecological issues. Climbing documentaries are shown at 3pm daily – great for rainy days. Rangers can answer questions about the area's hikes and issue climbing permits. They also post a lodging list.

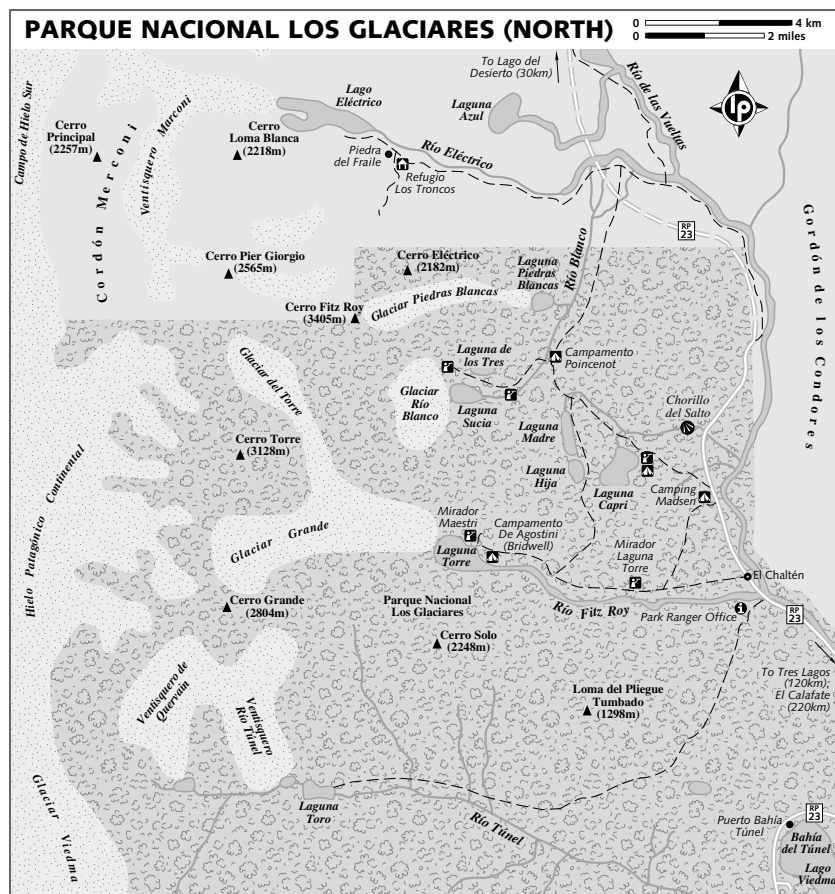
**Puesto Sanitario** (☎ 493033; AM De Agostini, btwn McLeod & Av MM De Güemes) Provides basic health services.

**Viento Oeste** (☎ 493021/200; Av San Martín 898) En route to Campamento Madsen, this shop sells books, maps and souvenirs and rents a wide range of camping equipment, as do several other sundries shops around town.

## Activities

### HIKING

Before heading out on the trail, hikers should stop by the park ranger office for updated trail conditions. The most stable weather for hiking comes not in summer but in March and April, when there is less wind (and fewer people). During the winter months of June and July trails may be closed – check first with the park ranger office.



Experienced backpackers can register to hike in the remote areas, which require some route-finding but reward with getting you off the central circuits and away from the crowds. A first-person ranger update is necessary for these hikes. For more information on hiking, read Lonely Planet's *Trekking in the Patagonian Andes*.

## Laguna Torre

If you have good weather (ie little wind) and clear skies, make this hike (three hours one way) a priority, since the toothy Cerro Torre is the most difficult local peak to see on normal blustery days.

Hikers have the option of taking two different trails to make this trek (they later merge).

One starts at the northwestern edge of El Chaltén. From a signpost on Av San Martín, just south of Campamento Madsen, head west on Eduardo Brenner and then right to find the signposted start of the track. The Laguna Torre track winds up westwards around large boulders on slopes covered with typical Patagonian dry-land plants, then leads southwest past a *mallín* (wet meadow) to a junction with a trail coming in from the left (see the following start) after 35 to 45 minutes.

If you start from the southern end of El Chaltén, follow Lago del Desierto west past the edge of town, then drop to the riverbed and continue past a tiny hydroelectric installation. At a signpost the route climbs away from the river and leads on through scat-

tered lenga and ñire woodland (with the odd wire fence to step over) before merging with a more prominent (signposted) path coming in from the right.

Continue up past a rounded bluff to the **Mirador Laguna Torre**, a crest giving you the first clear view up the valley to the extraordinary 3128m rock spire of Cerro Torre standing above a sprawling mass of intersecting glaciers. Look for the 'mushroom' of snow and ice that caps the peak. This precarious formation is the final obstacle for hard-core climbers, who often spend weeks waiting for decent weather.

The trail dips down gently through beautiful stands of stout ancient lengas, before cutting across open scrubby river flats and old revegetated moraines to reach a signposted junction with the Sendero Madre e Hija, a shortcut route to Campamento Poincenot, 40 to 50 minutes on. Continuing up the valley, bear left at another signposted fork and climb over a forested embankment to cross a small alluvial plain, following the fast-flowing glacial waters of the Río Fitz Roy. You'll arrive at **Campamento De Agostini** (formerly Campamento Bridwell) after a further 30 to 40 minutes. This free campground (with pit toilet) gets busy; it serves as a base camp for Cerro Torre climbers. The only other park-authorized place to camp in the vicinity is in a pleasant grove of riverside lengas below Cerro Solo.

Follow the trail along the lake's north side for about an hour to **Mirador Maestri** (no camping).

## Laguna de los Tres

This hike to a high alpine tarn is a bit more strenuous (four hours one way). The trail starts from the yellow-roofed pack station at **Campamento Madsen**. After about an hour, there's a signed lateral to excellent free back-country **campsites** at Laguna Capri. The main trail continues gently through windswept forests and past small lakes, meeting up with the trail from Lagunas Madre and Hija. Carrying on through wind-worn fire forest (a small, deciduous southern beech species) and along boggy terrain leads to **Río Blanco** (three hours) and the woody, mice-plagued **Campamento Poincenot**, exclusively reserved for climbers. The trail splits before Río Blanco to head to Río Eléctrico (there is an alternative, parallel trail after Río Blanco but markings are sparse and it is not recommended). Stay left to reach

a climbers' base camp. From here the trail zig-zags steeply up the tarn to the eerily still, glacial **Laguna de los Tres** and an extraordinary close view of 3405m Cerro Fitz Roy. Clouds ever huddle in the rocky crevasses, whipping up with a change in wind. Be prepared for high, potentially hazardous winds and allow time for contemplation and recovery. Scurry down 200m to the left of the lookout for an exceptional view of the emerald-green **Laguna Sucia**.

## Piedra del Fraile

At Campamento Poincenot, the trail swings west to Laguna de los Tres or northeast along Río Blanco to Valle Eléctrico and Piedra del Fraile (eight hours from El Chaltén; five hours from the Río Blanco turnoff). From the turnoff, the trail leads to **Glaciar Piedras Blancas** (four hours), the last part of which is a scramble over massive granite boulders to a turquoise lake with dozens of floating icebergs and constant avalanches on the glacier's face. The trail then passes through pastures and branches left up the valley along **Río Eléctrico**, enclosed by sheer cliffs, before reaching the private **Refugio Los Troncos** (campsites AR\$25, refugio beds AR\$70-120). Reservations are not possible since there are no phones – simply show up. The campground has a kiosk, restaurant and excellent services, and the owners can give information on recommended nearby trails.

Rather than backtracking to Río Blanco and the Laguna de los Tres trail, it's possible to head east, hopping over streams to RP 23, the route back to El Chaltén. You'll pass waterfall **Chorillo del Salto** shortly before reaching Campamento Madsen.

Buses to Lago del Desierto (below) drop hikers at the Río Eléctrico bridge (AR\$25).

## Loma del Pliegue Tumbado

Heading southwest from the park ranger office, this trail (four to five hours one way) skirts the eastern face of Loma del Pliegue Tumbado going toward Río Túnel, then cuts west and heads to Laguna Toro. It offers the best views of Cerros Torres and Fitz Roy. In fact, it's the only hike that allows views of both peaks at once. The hike is rather gentle, but be prepared for strong winds and carry extra water.

## Lago del Desierto & Beyond

Some 37km north of El Chaltén is Lago del Desierto, near the Chilean border, a nice

day-trip option when it's raining and there's no chance of catching a glimpse of the Fitz. A 500m trail leads to an overlook that often has fine views of the lake, surrounding mountains and glaciers.

**Las Lengas** (☎ 493044; Antonio de Viedma 95) offers minibus service to Lago del Desierto, leaving El Chaltén at 7am daily. On the half-day trip (AR\$50) the bus stops for two hours at the lake so passengers can trek to Glaciar Huemul or do the boat trip (extra). The all-day trip (AR\$90) stays at the lake for six hours. A *remise* charges AR\$140 roundtrip for three passengers, plus AR\$10 per hour to wait. At the south end of the lake, travelers can dine at **Hostería El Pilar** (☎ 493002; www.hosteriaelpilar.com.ar) in the inviting restaurant.

**Patagonia Aventura** (☎ 493110; www.patagonia-aventura.com.ar in Spanish; per person AR\$120) navigates Lago del Desierto. The alternative to the boat tour is a five-hour walking track between the south end and the north end of the lake.

From the lake's north end, it's increasingly popular to walk or bicycle to the Chilean border post, with hundreds of travelers now using the crossing each year. It's particularly popular with cyclists traveling on to the Chilean frontier outpost Candelaria Mansilla via cargo boat from the southernmost outpost of Villa O'Higgins, in Chile's Aisén region. In Candelaria Mansilla a family offers meals, camping and basic farmhouse accommodations; bring Chilean pesos from El Calafate, if possible. If you leave El Chaltén first thing in the morning, it's possible to cross the Chilean border and reach Candelaria Mansilla in one long day.

A Chilean **excursion boat** (www.villaohiggins.com in Spanish) goes from Candelaria Mansilla to see Glaciar O'Higgins (CH\$25,000) on the Southern Ice Shelf, and continues on to Villa O'Higgins (CH\$33,000) via Puerto Bahamondez. From Puerto Bahamondez, bus service to Villa O'Higgins is CH\$1500. The Villa O'Higgins **municipalidad** (☎ 56-7721-1849) may be able to help with further information and sleeping options. In El Chaltén, Albergue Patagonia (p488) and the tourist office can supply current details on this ever-evolving adventure option.

#### ICE CLIMBING & TREKKING

Several companies offer ice-climbing courses and ice treks, some including sleds pulled by Siberian huskies. **Fitzroy Expediciones** (☎ 493017; www.fitzroyexpediciones.com.ar; Lionel Terray 145, El

Chaltén) runs glacier-trekking excursions from Campamento De Agostini (Bridwell). The trek usually begins at 9:30am, starting with a 1½-hour walk to Glaciar Grande, then three hours on the glacier, returning to the campground around 5pm. Some groups head out the same day from El Chaltén, which makes for a very arduous trip. It is advisable to make reservations in town, but head to De Agostini on your own the night prior and camp. Bring extra food and water.

Another friendly and professional outfitter, **Casa de Guías** (☎ 493118; Av San Martín s/n; www.casadeguías.com.ar) has guides who are AAGM (Argentine Association of Mountain Guides) certified and speak English. They specialize in small groups and simple camps. Offerings include mountain traverses, mountain ascents for the very fit and rock-climbing classes.

**Patagonia Aventura** (☎ 493110; www.patagonia-aventura.com.ar in Spanish) offers trekking (AR\$230) and ice climbing (\$270) on Glaciar Viedma. Trips include a six-hour hike with views of the glacier, a 2½-hour ice trek and all-day instruction in ice climbing. Ice trekkers get to trudge with their crampons through some truly awesome lunar landscapes of ice and learn the basics of safety on ice.

Multiday guided hikes over the **Hielo Patagónico Continental** (Continental Ice Field) offer a unique experience for those of us not versed in polar expeditions. Catering to serious trekkers, this route involves technical climbing, including use of crampons and some strenuous river crossings. One-week packages start at AR\$3925.

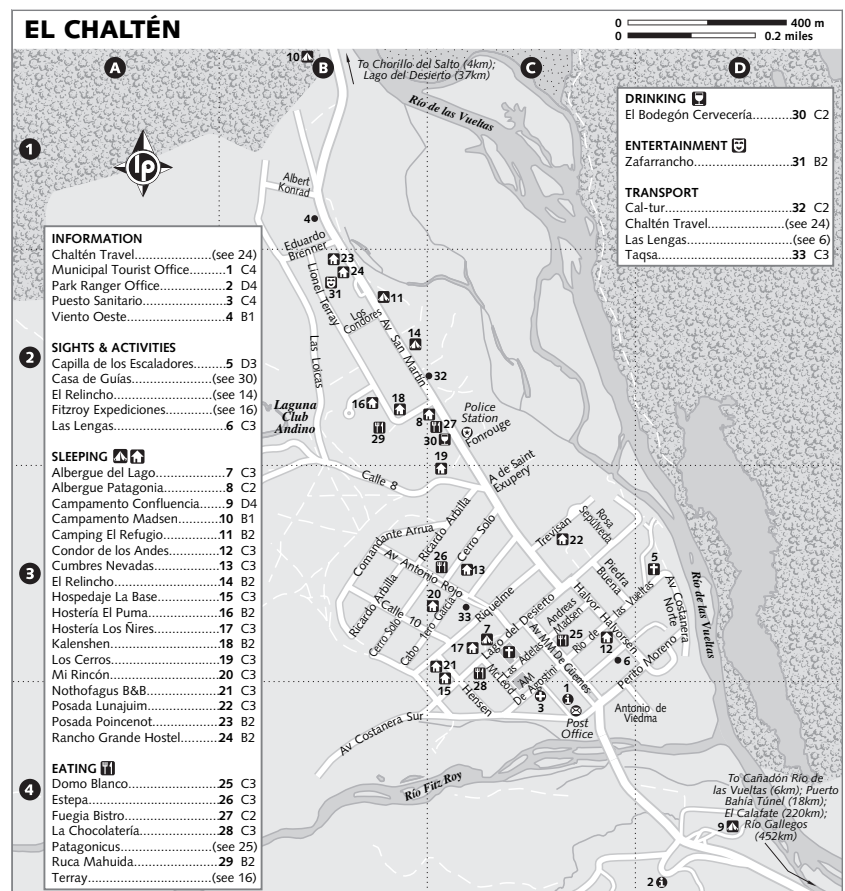
Certified guide **Pablo Gallego** (payosur@yahoo.com.ar) speaks English and French and commands fun treks at reasonable prices (AR\$300 per day).

#### HORSEBACK RIDING

Horses can be used to trot around town and to carry equipment with a guide (prices negotiable), but are not allowed unguided on national-park trails. Outfitter **El Relincho** (☎ 493007, in El Calafate 02902-491961; San Martín 505, El Chaltén) takes riders to the pretty valley of Río de las Vueltas (AR\$110, three hours).

#### KAYAK & CANOE TRIPS

As El Chaltén grows, so will the aquatic offerings. **Fitzroy Expediciones** (☎ 493017; www.fitzroyexpediciones.com.ar; Lionel Terray 145, El Chaltén) offers half-day guided kayaking trips on the Río



las Vueltas and two-day trips to Río La Leona. Daily trips go to Lago del Desierto for three-hour canoe and kayak excursions.

#### LAKE CRUISES

Contact **Patagonia Aventura** (☎ 493110; www.patagonia-aventura.com.ar in Spanish) about tourist launches from the teahouse at Puerto Bahía Túnel on the north shore of Lago Viedma. The trip (per person AR\$75, plus AR\$40 transfer) takes in impressive views of the 40m Glaciar Viedma, grinding from Cerro Fitz Roy. Boat trips leave at 3:30pm and last 2½ hours.

#### Sleeping

Reservations should be made at least one month in advance for the January–February

high season – demand here is that great. Plus it's particularly depressing to arrive in the middle of the night with the wind howling and no bed waiting. One solution is to bring a bombproof tent – there's always space in the campgrounds. Except for the backcountry campgrounds, all the following sleeping options are located in El Chaltén.

#### BUDGET Camping

Free backcountry campgrounds are very basic, with one pit toilet. Bury human waste as far from water sources as possible. Some sites have dead wood with which to create windbreaks. Fires are prohibited. Water is pure as glacial melt; make sure all cleaning is done

downstream from the campground and pack out all trash.

**Campamento Confluencia** (sites free) A zero-amenity campground across from the park ranger office and visitor center.

**Campamento Madsen** (sites free) Near the start of the Fitz Roy hike, at the north end of Av San Martín, this windy and exposed campground sits on the banks of Río de las Vueltas. There are a few trees and plenty of spots to access water. Showers (AR\$4) and laundry service (AR\$20) are available for all campers at Rancho Grande Hostel (below) between 8am and 4pm.

**Camping El Refugio** (☎ 493221; Av San Martín s/n; sites per person AR\$15, dm AR\$35) This private campground is attached to a basic hostel – hot showers for campers are included in the fee. Sites are exposed and there is some sparse firewood (fires are OK). It's across from Rancho Grande Hostel.

**Albergue del Lago** (☎ 493245; Lago del Desierto 135; sites per person AR\$15, dm AR\$35) Partying seems to be the priority of campers outside this hostel, which offers a shared kitchen and funky showers.

**El Relincho** (☎ 493007; Av San Martín 505; sites per person AR\$16) Another private campground, similarly wind-whipped.

## Hostels

Dorm beds fill up fast in summer. Unless otherwise noted, thin walls, cramped dorms and insufficient shared facilities are the norm.

**Albergue Patagonia** (☎ 493019; patagoniahotel@yahoo.com.ar; Av San Martín 493; dm AR\$35, d with/without bathroom AR\$180/100; ☞ Sep-May; ☒) This welcoming wooden farmhouse has a dormitory building with spacious, modern dorms and common areas. Services are good and the atmosphere is humming. The doubles with bathroom are worth coveting. Credit cards and traveler's checks are accepted. HI members get a slightly better rate.

**Rancho Grande Hostel** (☎ 493092; www.hostelspatagonia.com; Av San Martín 724; dm/d/tr/q AR\$35/180/195/230; ☒ ☒) Serving as Chaltén's Grand Central Station (Chaltén Travel buses stop here), this bustling backpacker factory has a little something for everyone, from bus reservations to internet (AR\$12 per hour) and café service. Clean four-bed rooms are stacked with blankets and bathrooms sport rows of shower stalls. The shared kitchen is tiny, and the common dining area bright, but both

are often crowded with nonguests. The café (meals AR\$13 to AR\$30), offering *milanesas*, mains and desserts, is a sure bet for grub in the off-hours. HI members get a discount.

**Condor de Los Andes** (☎ 493101; www.condordelosandes.com; cnr Río de las Vueltas & Halvor Halvorsen; dm/d AR\$40/180; ☒ Oct-Apr) This homey hostel has the feel of a ski lodge, with worn bunks, warm rooms and a roaring fire. Service is good, the guest kitchen is immaculate and there are comfortable lounge spaces. Extras include breakfast (AR\$7), lunch boxes (AR\$22) and laundry (AR\$15).

## MIDRANGE

**Mi Rincón** (☎ 493099; Cabo Tero García 115; s/d/tr without bathroom AR\$70/100/120) This adorable lodging has only a few rooms in the annex of a family home, but they are cozy and share an ample bathroom between them.

**Hospedaje La Base** (☎ 493031; labase@elchaltenpatagonia.com.ar; cnr Lago del Desierto & Hensen; d AR\$150) These spacious, good-value rooms all face outside and have kitchen access. Large groups should book rooms 5 and 6, which share an inside kitchen with dining area. The reception area has a popular video loft with a multilingual collection.

**Hosteria Los Nires** (☎ 493009; www.losnireschalten.com.ar in Spanish; cnr Lago del Desierto near Hensen; d/tr AR\$165/220; ☒ mid-Oct-mid-Apr; ☒) El Chaltén's first hotel has remodeled. Its 33 spotless rooms are ample and plain, with some showers oddly cramped. Hosts Tomas and Shirley are hospitable and can tell you about El Chaltén way back when.

**Posada Poincenot** (☎ 493022; www.chaltentravel.com; Av San Martín 615; s/d/tr/q AR\$150/180/195/230) Adjacent to Rancho Grande Hostel, Poincenot is a small, serene inn with conscientious owners. The larger rooms are ideal for families; all have private bathrooms.

**our pick Nothofagus B&B** (☎ 493087; www.elchalten.com/nothofagus; cnr Hensen & Riquelme; s/d/tr AR\$170/180/220; ☒ Sep-Apr; ☒) Attentive and adorable is this chalet-style inn offers a great green retreat. It is one of few Patagonian lodgings to separate organic waste and replaces towels only when asked. Wooden-beam rooms have carpet and some views, but most have bathrooms shared with one other room. Owners Eva and Gerardo, former guides, offer top service.

## TOP END

**Kalenshen** (☎ 493108; www.kalenshen.com.ar in Spanish; Lionel Terray 50; s/d AR\$270/300; ☒) Bring your swim cap, because steep rates at Kalenshen are prob-

ably due to this average hotel boasting the town's only heated indoor swimming pool. Decent tiled rooms come with log beds and a breakfast buffet.

**Cumbres Nevadas** (☎ 493160; Cerro Solo 95; 4-5-person cabins AR\$320) This midtown compound of yellow *cabañas* is ideal for groups: each has a kitchen, bathroom and TV. Low-season rates are AR\$50 less, but cabins may be occupied by seasonal workers.

**Posada Lunajuim** (☎ 493047; www.elchalten.com/Lunajuim; Trevisan s/n; s/d/tr AR\$325/386/463) Combining modern comfort with a touch of the off-beat, this artist-owned inn gets good reviews from guests. The halls are lined with the owner's monochrome sculptures and textured paintings, and a stone fireplace and library provide a rainy-day escape. Check out the rooms in the new wing.

**Hosteria El Puma** (☎ 493095; www.hosteriaelpuma.com.ar; Lionel Terray 212; s/d/tr AR\$330/420/460) This luxury lodge with 12 comfortable rooms offers intimacy without pretension. The rock-climbing and summit photographs and maps lining the hall may inspire your next expedition, but lounging by the fireplace is the most savory way to end the day. There's attentive service, a good breakfast and the gourmet restaurant Terray (right) on site.

**Los Cerros** (☎ 493182; www.loscerrosdelchalten.com; Av San Martín s/n; r per person AR\$550; ☒ Oct-Apr; ☒) New and chic, this top-end *hosteria* perched on a hill has sweeping views of the valley that holds El Chaltén. Think tribal-modern: the thick woven wall-hangings and natural fibers show an eye for style. The absence of TVs and phones in rooms is meant to bring you back to nature (but the gourmet meals, wine selections and wi-fi will surely zip you right back to civilization). Package rates are available.

## Eating & Drinking

Groceries, especially produce, are limited and expensive. Bring what you can from El Calafate.

**Domo Blanco** (☎ 493036; Av MM De Güemes s/n; scoops AR\$6) Homemade ice cream made with fruit harvested from a local *estancia* and calafate bushes in town.

**La Chocolateria** (☎ 493008; Lago del Desierto 104; snacks AR\$6-15) This irresistible chocolate factory tells the story of local climbing legends on the walls. It makes for an intimate evening out, with options ranging from spirit-spiked hot cocoa to wine and fondue.

**El Bodegón Cerveceria** (☎ 493109; Av San Martín s/n; snacks AR\$12) That après-hike pint usually evolves into a night out in this humming pub with *simpático* staff and a feisty female beer-master. Savor a stein of unfiltered blond pilsner or turbid bock with a bowl of popcorn. Pizza, pastas and *locro* (a spicy stew of maize, beans, beef, pork and sausage) are available.

**Fuegia Bistro** (☎ 493019; Av San Martín 493; mains AR\$18-34; ☒) Favored for its warm ambience and savory mains, this upscale eatery boasts good veggie options and a reasonable wine list. Try the lamb in ginger sauce or trout with sage butter. It's also open for breakfast.

**Patagonicus** (☎ 493025; cnr Av MM De Güemes & Andreas Madsen; pizzas AR\$21) The best pizza in town, with 20 kinds of pie, salads and wine served at sturdy wood tables. Cakes and coffee are also worth trying.

**Estepa** (☎ 493069; cnr Cerro Solo & Av Antonio Rojo; mains AR\$22-35) Local favorite Estepa cooks up consistent, flavorful dishes like lamb with calafate sauce, trout ravioli or spinach crepes. Pizza is popular, and hikers can order lunch boxes.

**Terray** (☎ 493095; Lionel Terray 212; mains AR\$28-38; ☒ 7:30-10:30pm Oct-May) Named in tribute to the Chamonix guide who first climbed Fitz Roy, this high-end kitchen at Hosteria El Puma cooks up hearty and original homemade meals like lima-bean risotto, chicken and grilled-fish salad, and lamb *osso buco*. Reserve ahead.

**Ruca Mahuida** (☎ 493018; Lionel Terray 104; mains AR\$36-57; ☒ 7-11pm) Some worry that this stone house with gourmet fare has lost its touch, but dishes like squash soufflé and salmon ravioli are a welcome departure from typical fare. The sheepskin benches, though, are pure Patagonia.

## Entertainment

Zafarrancho, behind Rancho Grande Hostel (opposite), is a bar-café that has internet and screens movies.

## Getting There & Away

El Chaltén is located 220km from El Calafate via newly paved roads.

For El Calafate (AR\$60, 3½ hours), Chaltén Travel (☎ 493005/92; cnr San Martín 724) has daily departures in summer at 6:30am, 7am, 1pm and 6pm from Rancho Grande Hostel. **Cal-tur** (☎ 493079; San Martín 520) and **Taqsa** (☎ 493068; Av Antonio Rojo 88) also make the trip, but none of these companies will take advance reservations. Service is less frequent off-season.

**Las Lengas** (☎ 493023/227; Antonio de Viedma 95) runs minivans at 5:30am to coastal destinations on RN 3, including Piedrabuena (AR\$95, six hours), from where travelers can take transportation to Parque Nacional Monte León.

Chaltén Travel heads north via RN 40 to Perito Moreno, Los Antiguos (up to 15 hours, both AR\$160) and Bariloche (AR\$360, two days) on even-numbered days at 8am.

## EL CALAFATE

☎ 02902 / pop 15,000

Named for the berry that, once eaten, guarantees your return to Patagonia, El Calafate hooks you with another irresistible attraction: Glaciar Perito Moreno, 80km away in Parque Nacional Los Glaciares. The glacier is a magnificent must-see, but its massive popularity has encouraged tumorous growth and rapid upscaling in the once-quiet El Calafate. At the same time, it's a fun place to be with a range of traveler services. The town's strategic location between El Chaltén and Torres del Paine (Chile) makes it an inevitable stop for those in transit.

Located 320km northwest of Río Gallegos, and 32km west of RP 11's junction with north-bound RN 40, El Calafate flanks the southern shore of Lago Argentino. The main strip, Av del Libertador General San Martín (typically abbreviated to Av Libertador), is dotted with cutesy knotted-pine souvenir shops, chocolate shops, restaurants and tour offices. Beyond the main street, pretensions melt away quickly: muddy roads lead to ad-hoc developments and open pastures.

January and February are the most popular (and costly) months to visit, but as shoulder-season visits grow steadily, both availability and prices stay a challenge.

## Information

### LAUNDRY

**El Lavadero** (☎ 492182; 25 de Mayo 43; per load AR\$15)

### MEDICAL SERVICES

**Hospital Municipal Dr José Formenti** (☎ 491001; Av Roca 1487)

### MONEY

Withdraw your cash before the weekend rush – it isn't uncommon for ATMs to run out on Sundays.

**Banco Santa Cruz** (Av Libertador 1285) Changes traveler's checks and has ATM.

**Thaler Cambio** (9 de Julio s/n; ☎ 10am–1pm Mon–Fri, 5:30–7:30pm Sat & Sun) Usurious rates for traveler's checks, but open weekends.

### POST

**Post office** (Av Libertador 1133)

### INTERNET ACCESS

**Cyberpoint** (Av Libertador 1070; ☎ 24hr)

### TELEPHONE

**Cooperativa Telefónica** (CTC; cnr Espora & Moyano)

There's another branch on Av Libertador, near Perito Moreno.

### TOURIST INFORMATION

**ACA** (Automóvil Club Argentino; ☎ 491-004; cnr 1 de Mayo & Av Roca) Argentina's auto club; good source for provincial road maps.

**Municipal tourist office** (☎ 491090/466; www.elcalafate.gov.ar in Spanish; ☎ 8am–10pm) At the bus terminal; has some English-speaking staff.

### Parque Nacional Los Glaciares office

(☎ 491005/755; Av Libertador 1302; ☎ 8am–7pm Mon–Fri, 10am–8pm Sat & Sun) Offers brochures and a decent map of Parque Nacional Los Glaciares. It's better to get info here than at the park.

### TRAVEL AGENCIES

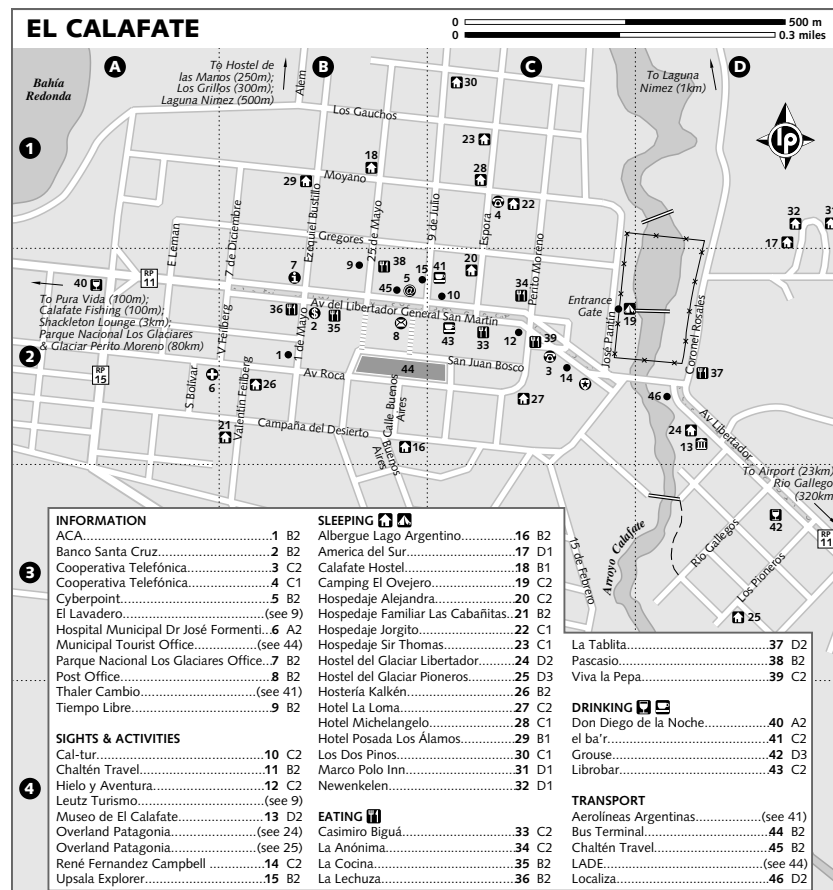
Most agents deal exclusively with nearby excursions and are unhelpful for other areas.

**Tiempo Libre** (☎ 491207; tiempo libre@cotecal.com.ar; 25 de Mayo 43) Books flights.

## Sights & Activities

In shuffled disrepair, **Museo de El Calafate** (Av Libertador 575; admission free; ☎ 8am–7pm Mon–Fri, 10am–4pm Sat & Sun) displays arrowheads, stuffed birds and early photographs. Alongside the lake-shore, north of town, **Laguna Nimez** (admission AR\$3; ☎ 9am–9pm) is prime avian habitat, but watching birds from El Calafate's shoreline on Lago Argentino can be just as good. Hiking up **Cerro Calafate** (850m) is possible, but the route behind Hostel del Glaciar Pioneros passes through marginal neighborhoods. While they are not considered dangerous, it is not exactly the ideal setting for hiking. To avoid them, ask a taxi to take you part way.

Anglers can take to the lakes with **Calafate Fishing** (☎ 493311; Av Libertador 1826; ☎ 10am–7pm Mon–Sat), offering fun fly-fishing trips to Lago Roca (full day AR\$450) and Lago Strobbe, where you can test rumors that the biggest rainbow trout in the world lives here.



Renting a **bike** (see Albergue Lago Argentino, p492) is an excellent way to get a feel for the area and cruise the dirt roads by the lake. Tour outfitters offer **4WD trips** to fossil beds as well as stays at regional **estancias**, where you can hike, ride horses or relax.

## Tours

Some 40 travel agencies arrange excursions to the glacier and other local attractions. Tour prices for Glaciar Perito Moreno (around AR\$90 per person) don't include the park entrance fee. Ask agents and other travelers about added benefits, like extra stops, boat trips, binoculars or multilingual guides. For other boat and tour operators based in El Calafate, see p495.

**Cal-tur** (☎ 491368; Av Libertador 1080) Specializes in El Chaltén tours and lodging packages.

**Chaltén Travel** (☎ 492212/480; www.chaltentravel.com; Av Libertador 1174) Recommended tours to the glacier, stopping for wildlife viewing (binoculars provided); also specializes in RN 40 trips.

**Overland Patagonia** (☎ 491243, 492243; www.glaciar.com) Operates out of both branches of Hostel del Glaciar Libertador (p492); organizes recommended 'alternative' and full-moon trips to the glacier, plus guided trekking, camping and ice-hiking combos in El Chaltén.

## Sleeping

In spite of abundant lodgings, there are always shortages here. Book ahead, even outside of peak season. The core high season is January–February, although some places



## IN CHATWIN'S PATAGONIA

'It's their Bible,' whispers a Welsh teahouse owner, spying a tourist-gripped tattered copy of *In Patagonia*. Thirty years on, Bruce Chatwin's cubist rendering of this southern extreme has become a pilgrim's guide to it. Who knew that Chatwin's musings on errant wanderings would transform them into tourist attractions: hiking from Estancia Harberton to Viamonte (guided with snack breaks); taking tea in Gaiman (hundreds do it weekly); even the sacred mylodon cave (marred with a life-sized replica of this prehistoric Chewbacca).

Not to worry. It's a big place. Patagonia's willful landscape and exiled eccentrics will long remain, and anyone with a good pair of boots and a willingness to break them in (as Chatwin did) can still find plenty to discover.

extend it from mid-October until April. Look for deep discounts in low season.

## BUDGET

Most hostels offer pickup from the bus terminal.

**Camping El Ovejero** (☎ 493422; campinglovejero@hotmail.com; José Pantín; sites per person AR\$10-15) Hosted by the charming Humberto, these are woodsy, well-kept, secure sites. Showers are spotless and there is 24-hour hot water. Extras include private tables, electricity and grills. It's located by the creek just north of the bridge into town.

**Albergue Lago Argentino** (☎ 491423; www.losglaciares.com/lagoargentino; Campaña del Desierto 1050; dm/d without bathroom AR\$30/80, s/d with bathroom AR\$110/160; ☑) Run by well-traveled couple Javier and Veronica, this pink property offers clean but squat basic dorms. Its annex *albergue* is geared towards couples, with quiet garden rooms and breakfast in a plant-filled nook with antique wood stove. The hosts provide good local information and bike rentals (AR\$13 per hour).

**Hospedaje Jorgito** (☎ 491323; Moyano 943; dm/d/tr without bathroom AR\$30/80/90) This mango home feels family-oriented in a way best described by the vintage Barbies, doilies and synthetic flowers providing animated decoration. Rooms vary in size but are bright and well kept. Guests can use the large kitchen.

**Los Dos Pinos** (☎ 491271/632; www.calafate.com/losdospinos; 9 de Julio 358; camping per person AR\$12, dm/d/tr without bathroom AR\$30/80/120, d/tr with bathroom AR\$150/180) With bargain doubles, this labyrinthine lodging has a supermarket selection of rooms, all adequate if not charming. Dorms lack insulation but have clean bathrooms and kitchen facilities. The full-service campground is sheltered but can get crowded.

**Hostel de las Manos** (☎ 492996; www.hostelde lasmanos.com.ar; Feruglio 59; dm AR\$30, d with bathroom AR\$150) Immaculate and personable, this hostel alternative is across the footbridge from 9 de Julio. A wall of windows provides ample light. Dorms are small but doubles have white wood paneling, bright bedspreads and new fixtures.

**Calafate Hostel** (☎ 492450/2; www.hostelspatagonia.com; Moyano 1226; dm AR\$30-34, s/d/tr/q standard AR\$100/140/160/180, superior AR\$120/150/200/240; ☑) Best suited to large groups, this mammoth log cabin ends up feeling blander than the competition. Double-bunk dorms are cozy, while the new annex features tidy brick doubles. It has airport pickup, café service and bilingual desk staff.

**Hostel del Glaciar Libertador** (☎ 491792; www.glaciar.com; Av Libertador 587; dm/s/d HI member AR\$31/183/200, nonmember AR\$37/220/241; ☑) The best deals here are dorm bunks with thick covers. Behind a Victorian facade, modern facilities include a top-floor kitchen and a spacious common area with a plasma TV glued to sports channels. The staff seems overtaxed and inquiries take patience.

**Hostel del Glaciar Pioneros** (☎ 491243; www.glaciar.com; Los Pioneros 251; dm/d AR\$34/193; ☑) A 15-minute walk from town, this sociable hostel offers comfortable common areas and small dorms. In low season it closes, funneling backpackers to its sister hostel, Hostel del Glaciar Libertador.

**Marco Polo Inn** (☎ 493899; www.marcopoloinn calafate.com; Calle 405, No 82; dm/d/tr HI member AR\$38/200/250, nonmember AR\$40/220/270; ☑) A new addition with attentive service and spacious dorms featuring quilted bedspreads and wood-finished bunks. Doubles have bathrooms and extra amenities like hair dryers and TVs. A pool table and telescope provide extra diversion.

**our pick America del Sur** (☎ 493525; www.americadel sur.com.ar; Puerto Deseado 151; dm/d AR\$40/140; ☑) This backpacker favorite boasts top-tier service and a stylish lodge setting with views. One thing you won't find here is solitude – it's bustling at every hour. All-you-can-eat barbecues are put on nightly (AR\$35), to the rave reviews of guests. Reserve ahead.

**Hospedaje Alejandra** (☎ 491328; Espora 60; d/tr without bathroom AR\$50/75, 5-person cabin AR\$280) A charming family lodging smack in the center, Alejandra offers small, dark doubles with impeccable housekeeping and a delightful knick-knack collection that includes Hello Kitty and plastic fruit.

## MIDRANGE

The tourist office has a complete list of *cabañas* and apartment hotels, which are the best deals for groups and families.

**Los Grillos** (☎ 491160, Los Condores 1215; d with/without bathroom AR\$140/110, 4-person cabin AR\$180) A quiet B&B with fresh rooms, soft beds and attentive service. Guests can serve themselves coffee, tea and spring water in the dining nook. The backyard cabin offers shaggy bedspreads and all-new fixtures and appliances. A *quincho* (thatched-roof building) under construction will give guests an ample cooking and recreation space.

**Hospedaje Sir Thomas** (☎ 492220; www.cotecal.com.ar/hospedajesirthomas in Spanish; Espora 257; d AR\$135) Quiet and central, this friendly picket-fence B&B offers 10 tidy rooms with thin carpet, tiled bathrooms and beds clad in plaid blankets. It lacks a common space; a cramped breakfast area serves packaged muffins with tea or coffee.

**Hospedaje Familiar Las Cabañas** (☎ 491118; lascabanitas@cotecal.com.ar; Valentín Feilberg 218; d/tr/q AR\$160/210/240) Run by the endearing Giordano family, these storybook A-frames are somewhat dated but snug, with spiral staircases leading to loft beds. Sweet touches include English lavender and a sheltered dining patio brimming with plants. There's hot-beverage service, kitchen use and meals upon request.

**Hotel La Loma** (☎ 491016; www.lalomahotel.com; Av Roca 849; s/d standard AR\$140/170, superior AR\$175/265; ☑) Colonial furnishings and a lovely rock garden enhance this rambling ranch-style retreat. While its exterior is nondescript, superior rooms are spacious and bright. Antiques fill the creaky hallways and the re-

ception area boasts an open fire and plenty of books. Breakfast includes homemade bread, and guests can take dips in the only indoor pool in town.

**Newenkelen** (☎ 493943; www.newenkelen.com.ar; Puerto Deseado 223; d AR\$180) Perched on a hill above town, this intimate option features a handful of immaculate brick rooms with tasteful bedding and mountain views. The *porteña* owner can be convinced to give tango lessons in low season.

## TOP END

Luxury hotels are being added at a quick clip, though not all offer the same standard.

**Hotel Michelangelo** (☎ 491045; www.michaelangelo hotel.com.ar in Spanish; Moyano 1020; s/d AR\$210/272; ☑) Tour groups favor this Swiss-chalet-style lodging in the center of town. Dimly lit and somewhat dated, its identical rooms have heavy drapes, high ceilings and full amenities. The hallways smell of cigarette smoke but there's a good restaurant, buffet breakfast and multilingual service.

**Hosteria Kalkén** (☎ 491073/687; www.losglaciares.com/kalken; Valentín Feilberg 119; s/d AR\$264/291; ☑) This hush Spanish-style hotel is understated and elegant, with a full bar and fireplace to greet tired travelers. Staff are well disposed and prim doubles keep the rays out with thick curtains. The continental breakfast is abundant and good.

**Hotel Posada Los Álamos** (☎ 491144; www.posada losalamos.com; Moyano 1355; s/d/st AR\$604/658/967; ☑) Calafate's original resort swims in luxury: plush rooms, overstuffed sofas, spectacular gardens, tennis courts, putting greens and a spa. It's enough to make you almost forget about seeing that glacier. Some find the walls a bit thin for a four-star getaway. It features rooms accessible for disabled travelers as well.

## Eating

For a quick bite, try the ice-cream parlors and chocolate shops along Av Libertador.

**La Anónima** (cnr Av Libertador & Perito Moreno) Cheap take-out and groceries.

**La Lechuza** (☎ 491610; Av Libertador 1301; pizzas AR\$18) A classic selection of empanadas, salads and pizzas is served on round wooden plates – try the sheep cheese and olive pizza. Microbrew beers and a warm brick ambience cement its favor with the public.

**La Cocina** (☎ 491758; Av Libertador 1245; mains AR\$20-30) This classic pasta factory makes satisfying noodles with savory sauces and serves up a whopping *lomo a la pobre* (steak and eggs) for the carb-adverse.

**Viva la Pepa** (☎ 491880; Amado 833; mains AR\$21-40; ☎ 10am-midnight, closed Wed) Decked out in children's drawings, this cheerful café specializes in crepes but also offers great sandwiches with homemade bread (try the chicken with apple and blue cheese), fresh juice and gourds of *mate*.

**La Tablita** (☎ 491065; Coronel Rosales 24; mains AR\$30-50) Steak and spit-roasted lamb are the stars at this satisfying *parrilla*, popular beyond measure. For average appetites a half-steak will do, rounded out with a good malbec, fresh salad or garlic fries. Reserve ahead.

**Pura Vida** (☎ 493356; Av Libertador 1876; mains AR\$32-49; ☎ dinner Thu-Tue) Whole grains and abundant vegetarian dishes make this ambient eatery a traveler's treat. Tables are candlelit and the kitchen serves healthy food in huge portions. Try the gnocchi with saffron, rabbit with cream or pumpkin stew served in an enormous gourd. It's a ten-minute walk west of the center.

**Casimiro Biguá** (☎ 492590; Av Libertador 963; mains AR\$35) With warm copper accents and a hustling staff, this chic eatery and *vinoteca* (wine bar) offers an impressive list of 180 Argentine wines. The chef creates wonderful homemade pastas, risotto, lamb stew and grilled trout, but the star feature is the grill. It's no wonder the Kirchners often drop by; their weekend house is nearby.

**Pascasio** (☎ 492055; 25 de Mayo 52; mains AR\$48) In an elegant, pared-down setting, this local star offers tasty innovations like wok seafood and ginger noodles, as well as exotic dishes like ñandú, wild boar and hare. Save room for decadent desserts, such as the serious 'study in chocolate.'

## Drinking

**el ba'r** (9 de Julio s/n; snacks AR\$8-17) This trendy patio café is the hotspot for you and your sweater-clad puppy to order espresso, *submarinos* (hot milk with melted chocolate bar), green tea or sandwiches.

**Grouse** (☎ 491281; Av Libertador 351; drinks AR\$4-12) This Celtic pub/karaoke hub aims to appeal to all whims. Look for live acts in summer, generous mixed drinks and cans of Guinness.

**Librobar** (☎ 491464; Av Libertador 1015) Upstairs in the gnome village, this hip book-bar serves

coffee and bottled beers alongside a stack of quality reads in English and Spanish.

**Shackleton Lounge** (☎ 493516; Av Libertador 3287) This laid-back lounge, 3km from the center, pleases crowds with good music and strong daiquiris.

**Don Diego de la Noche** (Av Libertador 1603; ☎ until 5am) This perennial favorite serves dinner and features live music like tango, guitar and *folklore* (Argentine folk music).

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

The modern **Aeropuerto El Calafate** (ECA; ☎ 491220/30) is 23km east of town off RP 11; the departure tax is US\$18.

**Aerolíneas Argentinas** (☎ 492814/16; 9 de Julio 57) flies every day to Bariloche (AR\$879), Ushuaia (AR\$350), Trelew (AR\$820) and both Aeroparque and Ezeiza in Buenos Aires (AR\$380 to AR\$675).

**LADE** (☎ 491262; at bus terminal) flies a few times a week to Río Gallegos (AR\$118), Comodoro Rivadavia (AR\$203), Ushuaia (AR\$280), Esquel (AR\$412), Puerto Madryn (AR\$335), Buenos Aires (AR\$336) and other smaller regional airports.

### BUS

El Calafate's hilltop **bus terminal** (Av Roca s/n) is easily reached by a pedestrian staircase from the corner of Av Libertador and 9 de Julio. Book ahead in high season, as outbound seats can be in short supply.

For El Chaltén (AR\$55, 3½ hours), several companies share passengers and leave daily at 7:30am, 8am and 6:30pm, stopping midway at Estancia La Leona for coffee and tasty pies.

For Puerto Natales (AR\$50, five hours), **Cootra** (☎ 491444) departs daily at 8:30am, crossing the border at Cerro Castillo, where it may be possible to connect to Torres del Paine.

For Río Gallegos (AR\$20 to \$40, four hours), buses go daily at 3am, 4am, noon, 12:30pm and 2:30pm. **Freddy** (☎ 452671) and Interlagos offer connections to Bariloche and Ushuaia that require leaving in the middle of the night and a change of buses in Río Gallegos.

From mid-October to April, **Chaltén Travel** (☎ 492212/480; www.chaltentravel.com; Av Libertador 1174) goes to El Chaltén (AR\$100 roundtrip, three hours) daily at 8am and 6:30pm. It also runs shuttles north along RN 40 to Perito Moreno

and Los Antiguos (AR\$215, 12 hours), departing on even-numbered days at 8am, to connect with onward service to Bariloche (AR\$395, two days from El Calafate) the next morning. The same service also leaves from El Chaltén.

## Getting Around

Airport shuttle **Ves Patagonia** (☎ 494355) has no office; call for door-to-door service (one way/roundtrip AR\$15/25). There are several car-rental agencies at the airport. **Localiza** (☎ 491398, 02902-15-622565; www.localiza.com.ar; Av Libertador 687) offers car rentals for AR\$186 daily with 200km.

## AROUND EL CALAFATE

From El Calafate, paved RN 40 cuts southeast across vast steppe for 95km, then jogs south at **El Cerrito** and turns to gravel. Staying on paved RP 5 means a slow-going, five-hour, 224km bore of a trip southeast to **Río Gallegos**. Halfway along RP 5, at Km 146, is the utilitarian **Hotel La Esperanza** (☎ 02902-499200; per person AR\$60; ☎ year-round), a gas-station diner (daily special AR\$25) with quick, friendly service. If you plan to stay, ask for a room in the newer cabin. From here, paved RP 7 connects back to RN 40 for the Chilean border crossing at Cerro Castillo–Cancha Carrera, Parque Nacional Torres del Paine and Puerto Natales.

## PARQUE NACIONAL LOS GLACIARES (SOUTH)

Among the Earth's most dynamic and accessible ice fields, **Glaciario Perito Moreno** is the stunning centerpiece of the southern sector of **Parque Nacional Los Glaciares** (admission AR\$30). Locally referred to as Glaciario Moreno, it measures 30km long, 5km wide and 60m high, but what makes it exceptional in the world of ice is its constant advance – up to 2m per day, causing building-sized icebergs to calve from its face. In some ways, watching the glacier is a very sedentary park experience, but it manages to nonetheless be thrilling.

The glacier formed as a low gap in the Andes allowed moisture-laden Pacific storms to drop their loads east of the divide, where they accumulate as snow. Over millennia, under tremendous weight, this snow has recrystallized into ice and flowed slowly eastward. The 1600-sq-km trough of **Lago Argentino**, the country's largest single body of

water, is unmistakable evidence that glaciers were once far more extensive than today.

While most of the world's glaciers are receding, Glaciario Moreno is considered 'stable.' Regardless, 17 times between 1917 and 2006, as the glacier has advanced, it has dammed the Brazo Rico (Rico Arm) of Lago Argentino, causing the water to rise. Several times, the melting ice below has been unable to support the weight of the water behind it and the dam has collapsed in an explosion of water and ice. To be present when this spectacular cataclysm occurs is unforgettable.

Visiting Glaciario Moreno is no less an auditory than a visual experience, as huge icebergs on the glacier's face calve and collapse into the **Canal de los Témpanos** (Iceberg Channel). This natural-born tourist attraction is ideally located at Península de Magallanes – close enough to guarantee great views, but far enough away to be safe. A series of recently improved catwalks and vantage points allow visitors to see, hear and photograph the glacier. Sun hits its face in the morning and the glacier's appearance changes as the day progresses and shadows shift.

A massive makeover is in the works at Glaciario Moreno. At the time of writing, a hotel was being built near the glacier lookout; look for a new *confitería* and parking as well. Since trash is difficult and costly to remove from the area, please pack yours out.

The main gateway town to the park's southern sector, El Calafate (p490), is 80km east of the glacier by road.

## Activities

### GLACIARIO PERITO MORENO

**Boat trips** allow you to sense the magnitude of Glaciario Moreno, even though the boats keep a distance. **Hielo y Aventura** (☎ 02902-492094/205; www.hieloyaventura.com; Av Libertador 935, El Calafate) runs Safari Náutico (AR\$35), a one-hour tour of Brazo Rico, Lago Argentino and the south side of Canal de los Témpanos. Catamarans crammed with up to 130 passengers leave hourly between 11:30am and 3:30pm from Puerto Bajo de las Sombras.

Hielo y Aventura also offers **minitrekking** (AR\$275) on the glacier, a five-hour trek for groups of up to 20, involving a quick boat ride from Puerto Bajo de las Sombras, a walk through lenga forests, a quick chat on glaciology and then a 1½-hour ice walk using crampons. The more extensive **big ice**





(AR\$375) offers a worthwhile four-hour ice trek. Children under eight are not allowed; reserve ahead and bring your own food.

To see the glacier's main north face, **René Fernández Campbell** (☎ 02902-492340; [www.fernandezcampbell.com](http://www.fernandezcampbell.com); Av Libertador 867, El Calafate) operates 320-passenger boats (AR\$38) from below the UTMV restaurant near the main lookout, hourly between 10:30am and 2:30pm.

Beyond a short walk that parallels the shoreline at the boat dock and climbs to the lookout area, there are no trails in this sector of the park accessible without boat transportation.

#### GLACIAR UPSALA & LAGO ONELLI

Glacier Upsala – 595-sq-km huge, 60km long and some 4km wide in parts – can be admired for its monumental dimensions alongside the strange and graceful forms of the nearby icebergs. The downside is that it can only be enjoyed from the crowded deck of a massive catamaran: just you and nature and 300 of your closest friends. On an extension of the Brazo Norte (North Arm) of Lago Argentino, it's accessible by launch from Puerto Bandera, 45km west of Calafate by RP 11 and RP 8.

**Upsala Explorer** (☎ 02902-491034; 9 de Julio 69, El Calafate) runs boat tours (AR\$377) to Upsala that end with a visit to the isolated Estancia Cristina. Prices do not include transfer (AR\$38) and park entry fee.

For the grand tour, **René Fernández Campbell** (☎ 02902-492340; [www.fernandezcampbell.com](http://www.fernandezcampbell.com); Av Libertador 867, El Calafate) does an all-glacier tour (AR\$240) from Punta Bandera, visiting Glacier Upsala, Bahía Onelli and Glacier Spegazzini. If icebergs are cooperating, boats may allow passengers to disembark at Bahía Onelli to walk 500m to iceberg-choked **Lago Onelli**, where the Onelli and Agassiz glaciers merge. Meals are expensive, but you can bring your own picnic.

#### LAGO ROCA

The serene south arm of Lago Argentino offers a great escape into lakeshore forests and mountains. Good hikes, pleasant camping and *estancia* accommodations occupy this most southerly section of the park, where most visitors rarely travel. No entrance fee is charged to access this section. Hikers can climb **Cerro Cristal**, a rugged but rewarding 3½-hour

hike. It begins at the education camp at La Jerónima, just before the Camping Lago Roca entrance, 55km southwest of El Calafate along RP 15. On a clear day, you can see Glacier Moreno and the Torres del Paine.

Horseback-riding trips with **Cabalguas del Glaciar** (☎ 495447; [www.cabalguasdelglaciar.com](http://www.cabalguasdelglaciar.com)) offer glacier panoramas; they can also be booked through **Cal-tur** (☎ 02902-491368; Av Libertador 1080, El Calafate). **Leutz Turismo** (☎ 02902-492316; [leutzturismo@cotecal.com.ar](mailto:leutzturismo@cotecal.com.ar); 25 de Mayo 43, El Calafate) takes visitors on day trips to Estancia Nibepo Aike (AR\$155) from El Calafate. The morning or afternoon visits include tea, *mate* and fresh pastries, a sheepshearing demonstration and an hour of horseback riding.

#### Sleeping & Eating

Unfortunately, the campground at Bahía Escondida has been closed for recovery, since unattended campfires were threatening the area. Inquire about changes at the park.

**Camping Lago Roca** (☎ 02902-499500; [www.losglaciares.com/campinglagoroca](http://www.losglaciares.com/campinglagoroca); per person AR\$16, cabin dm for 2/4 AR\$80/140) An excellent option for independent travelers, this full-service campground with restaurant-bar, located a few kilometers past the education camp, makes a good base to explore the area. The clean cement-walled dorms provide a snug alternative to camping. In summer singles pay the double rate in dorms. Hiking trails abound, and the center rents fishing equipment and bikes and coordinates horseback riding at the nearby *estancia*.

**Estancia Nibepo Aike** (☎ 02966-492858/9; [www.nibepoaike.com.ar](http://www.nibepoaike.com.ar); RP 15, Km 60; half-pension 2 nights s/d AR\$905/1187; ☞ Oct-Apr) This working sheep and cattle ranch offers the usual assortment of *estancia* highlights. In addition to horseback riding, guests have the option to explore the surroundings on two wheels from the bicycle stash. The original *casco* of this Croatian ranch offers modern comforts: elegant rooms have private bathrooms and beds draped in woven blankets. Homemade bread, scones and jam brighten the breakfast table. Nibepo Aike overlooks the southern arm of Lago Argentino, 5km past the campground on RP 15.

**Hosteria Estancia Helsingfors** (☎ in Buenos Aires 011-4315-1222; [www.helsingfors.com.ar](http://www.helsingfors.com.ar); s/d AR\$1068/1727; ☞ Oct-Apr) The simply stunning location ogling Cerro Fitz Roy from Lago Viedma makes for lots of love-at-first-sight impressions. Intimate and welcoming, this former Finnish pioneer ranch is a highly regarded luxury destination, though it cultivates a relaxed, unpretentious ambience. Guests pass the time on scenic but demanding mountain treks, rides and visits to Glacier Viedma. Vintage wines accompany gourmet meals made with fresh garden produce. Rates represent a two-day, one-night stay, with transfers, an excursion and meals. It's on Lago Viedma's southern shore, 170km from El Chaltén and 180km from El Calafate.

**UTVM Restaurant** (☎ 02902-499400; snacks AR\$9-16, mains AR\$20; ☞ 10am-6pm) At the glacier lookout, this year-round restaurant offers sandwiches,

#### GLACIOLOGY 101

Ribbons of ice, stretched flat in sheets or sculpted by weather and fissured by pressure, glaciers have a raw magnificence that is boggling to behold.

As snow falls on the accumulation area, it compacts to ice. The river of ice is slugged forward by gravity, which deforms its layers as it moves. When the glacier surges downhill, melted ice mixes with rock and soil on the bottom, grinding it into a lubricant that keeps pushing the glacier along. At the same time, debris from the crushed rock is forced to the sides of the glacier, creating features called moraines. Movement also causes cracks and deformities called crevasses.

The ablation area is where the glacier melts. When accumulation outpaces melting at the ablation area, the glacier advances; when there's more melting or evaporation, the glacier recedes. Since 1980, global warming has contributed greatly to widespread glacial retreat.

Another marvel of glaciers is their hue. What makes some blue? Wavelengths and air bubbles. The more compact the ice, the longer the path that light has to travel and the bluer the ice appears. Air bubbles in uncompacted areas absorb long wavelengths of white light so we see white. Where glacier melt calves into lakes, it dumps a 'glacial flour' comprised of ground-up rock that gives the water a milky, grayish color. This same sediment remains unsettled in some lakes and diffracts the sun's light, creating a stunning palette of turquoise, pale mint and azure.

coffee and desserts, and a set lunch for which reservations are advised.

### Getting There & Away

Glacier Moreno is 80km west of El Calafate via paved RP 11, passing through the breathtaking scenery around Lago Argentino. Bus tours (AR\$90 roundtrip) are frequent in summer; see p491, or simply stroll down El Calafate's Av Libertador. Buses leave El Calafate in the early morning and afternoon, returning around noon and 7pm.

## CHILEAN PATAGONIA

Rugged seascapes rimmed with glacial peaks, the stunning massifs of Torres del Paine and howling steppe characterize the other side of the Andes. If you have come this far, it is well worth it to cross the border. Chilean Patagonia, a mountainous region sculpted by westerly winds, consists of the isolated Aisén and Magallanes regions, separated by the southern continental ice field. This section covers Punta Arenas, Puerto Natales and spectacular Parque Nacional Torres del Paine. For in-depth coverage of Chile, pick up Lonely Planet's *Chile & Easter Island*.

Most nationals of countries that have diplomatic relations with Chile don't need a visa to enter the country. Upon entering, customs officials will issue you a tourist card, valid for 90 days and renewable for another 90; authorities take it seriously, so guard it closely to avoid the hassle of replacing it. If arriving by air, US citizens must pay a one-time reciprocal entry fee of US\$132, valid for the life of the passport; Canadians pay US\$132 and Australians US\$56.

Temperature-sensitive travelers will quickly notice a difference after leaving energy-rich Argentina: in public areas and budget accommodations central heating is rare; warmer clothing is the norm indoors.

Chile is slightly more expensive than Argentina, and US cash is not as widely accepted. Prices here are given in Chilean Pesos (CH\$).

### PUNTA ARENAS

☎ 61 / pop 130,136

Today's Punta Arenas is a confluence of the ruddy and the grand, witnessed in the elaborate wool-boom mansions, the thriving petrochemical industry and its port status. Visitors

will find it the most convenient base to travel around the remote Magallanes region, with good traveler services. In truth, the city's increasing prosperity has sanded down and polished off its former roughneck reputation. Watch for more cruise-ship passengers and trekkers to replace the explorers, sealers and sailors of yesterday at the barstools – but save a spot for the old guard.

Founded in 1848 as a penal settlement and military garrison, Punta Arenas proved to be conveniently situated for ships headed to Alta California during the gold rush. The economy flourished during its early years, taking off only in the last quarter of the 19th century, after the territorial governor authorized the purchase of 300 pure-bred sheep from the Falkland Islands. This successful experiment encouraged the proliferation of sheep farming and, by the turn of the century, nearly two million animals grazed the territory.

### Information

Travel agencies in the center, along Roca and Lautaro Navarro, change cash and traveler's checks. All are open weekdays and Saturday, with a few open on Sunday morning. Banks with ATMs dot the city center.

**Chill-e** (Av Colón 782; ☎ 9:30am–12:30am Mon–Fri, 11am–12:30am Sat, 3–11pm Sun) A comfy art deco space for internet access, with long hours and wireless connections.

**Conaf** (☎ 223841; José Menéndez 1147) Has details on the nearby parks.

**Hospital Regional** (☎ 205000; cnr Arauco & Angamos) **Information kiosk** (☎ 200610; www.puntaarenas.cl in Spanish; Plaza Muñoz Gamero; ☎ 8am–7pm Mon–Sat, 9am–7pm Sun) South side of the plaza.

**Lavaso!** (☎ 243607; O'Higgins 969) Laundry service. Hostels do laundry for a bit less.

**Post office** (Bories 911)

**Sernatur** (☎ 241330; www.sernatur.cl; Waldo Seguel 689; ☎ 8:15am–8pm Mon–Fri Dec–Feb, 8:15am–6pm Mon–Thu, 8:15am–5pm Fri rest of year) With friendly, well-informed, multilingual staff, and lists of accommodations and transportation. Also has a list of recommended doctors.

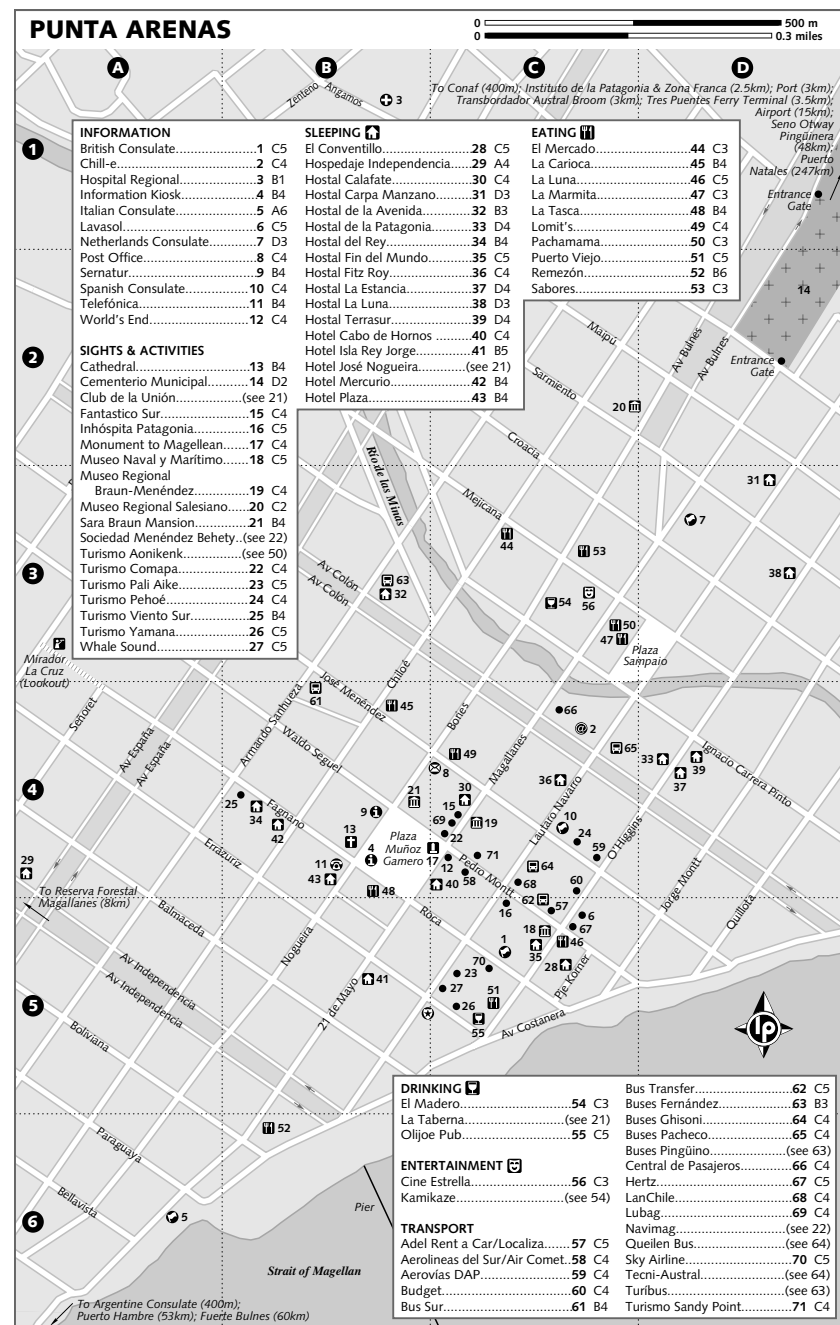
**Telefónica** (Nogueira 1116)

**World's End** (☎ 213117; Plaza Muñoz Gamero 1011) Maps, photo books, souvenirs and Lonely Planet guides in English and Spanish.

### Sights & Activities

#### PLAZA MUÑOZ GAMERO

In the heart of Punta Arenas, this central plaza is lined with magnificent conifers and



surrounded by opulent mansions. Facing the plaza's north side is the Club de la Unión, which houses the former **Sara Braun mansion** (☎ 241489; admission CH\$1000; ☞ 10:30am-1pm & 5-8:30pm Tue-Fri, 10:30am-1pm & 8-10pm Sat, 11am-2pm Sun), now open for visits. The **monument** commemorating the 400th anniversary of Magellan's voyage was donated by wool baron José Menéndez in 1920. Just east is the former **Sociedad Menéndez Behety**, which now houses Turismo Comapa. The **cathedral** sits west.

### RESERVA FORESTAL MAGALLANES

This **reserve** (admission free; ☞ daylight hours), 8km from town, offers great hiking and mountain biking through dense lenga and coihue. A steady slog takes you to the top of Mt Fenton, where views are spectacular and winds impressively strong.

### MUSEO REGIONAL BRAUN-MENÉNDEZ

Also known as the Palacio Mauricio Braun, this opulent **mansion** (☎ 244216; Magallanes 949; admission CH\$1000, free Sun; ☞ 10:30am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10:30am-2pm Sun in summer, to 2pm daily in winter) testifies to the wealth and power of pioneer sheep farmers in the late 19th century. One of Mauricio Braun's sons donated the house to the state against other family members' wishes. The well-maintained interior is divided into two sections: one half is a regional historical museum (booklets with English descriptions are available); the other half displays the original exquisite French-nouveau family furnishings, from intricate wooden inlaid floors to Chinese vases.

The museum is most easily accessed from Magallanes. There's a café downstairs in what used to be the servants' quarters.

### CEMENTERIO MUNICIPAL

Among South America's most fascinating cemeteries, **Cementerio Municipal** (main entrance at Av Bulnes 949; ☞ 7:30am-8pm) contains a mix of humble immigrant graves and extravagant tombs under topiary cypresses. In death as in life, Punta Arenas' first families flaunted their wealth – wool baron José Menéndez' extravagant tomb is, according to Bruce Chatwin, a scale replica of Rome's Vittorio Emanuele monument. But the headstones also tell the stories of Anglo, German, Scandinavian and Yugoslav immigrants. There's also a monument to the Selk'nam (Ona) and a map posted inside the main entrance gate.

The cemetery is an easy 15-minute stroll northeast of the plaza, or you can catch any taxi *colectivo* (shared cab with specific route) from in front of the Museo Regional Braun-Menéndez on Magallanes.

### MUSEO NAVAL Y MARÍTIMO

Punta Arenas' naval and maritime **museum** (☎ 205479; Pedro Montt 981; adult/child CH\$1500/800; ☞ 9:30am-12:30pm & 3-6pm Tue-Sat) has varied exhibits on model ships, naval history, the unprecedented visit of 27 US warships to Punta Arenas in 1908, and a fine account of the Chilean mission that rescued British explorer Sir Ernest Shackleton's crew from Antarctica. The most imaginative display is a replica ship complete with bridge, maps, charts and radio room.

### MUSEO REGIONAL SALESIANO

Especially influential in settling the region, the Salesian order collected outstanding ethnographic artifacts, but their **museum** (☎ 221001; Av Bulnes 336; admission CH\$1500; ☞ 10am-12:30pm & 3-6pm Tue-Sun) touts their role as peacemakers between the Yaghan and Ona and settlers. The best materials are on indigenous groups and the mountaineer priest Alberto de Agostini.

### INSTITUTO DE LA PATAGONIA

Pioneer days are made real again at the Patagonian Institute's **Museo del Recuerdo** (☎ 207056; www.umag.cl in Spanish; Av Bulnes 01890; admission CH\$1000; ☞ 8:30-11am & 2:30-6pm Mon-Fri), part of the Universidad de Magallanes. On display are a collection of antique farm and industrial machinery, a typical pioneer house and shearing shed, and a wooden-wheeled shepherds' trailer. The library has historical maps and a series of historical and scientific publications. Any taxi *colectivo* to the *zona franca* (duty-free zone) will drop you across the street.

### Tours

Worthwhile day trips include tours to the **Seno Otway pingüinera** (penguin colony; p507), located 48km north. Tours (CH\$15,000) leave at 4pm daily October through March. Visits to the town's first settlements at **Fuerte Bulnes** & **Puerto Hambre** (admission CH\$1000) leave at 10am. Both tours can be done in one day; by sharing a rental car and going at opposite times visitors can avoid the strings of tour groups. Most lodgings will help arrange tours – if they don't run their own operation.

Torres del Paine tours are abundant from Punta Arenas, but the distance makes for a very long day; it's best to head to Puerto Natales and organize transport from there.

If you have the time, a more atmospheric alternative to Seno Otway is the thriving Magellanic penguin colonies of **Monumento Natural Los Pingüinos** (p507) on Isla Magdalena. Five-hour tours on the *Barcaza Melinka* (adult/child CH\$15,000/7500) land for an hour at the island and depart the port on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, December through February. Confirm times in advance. Book tickets through **Turismo Comapa** (☎ 200200; www.comapa.com; Magallanes 990) and bring a picnic.

Recommended agencies:

**Fantástico Sur** (☎ 710050; www.fantasticosur.com; Magallanes 960)

**Inhóspita Patagonia** (☎ 224510; Lautaro Navarro 1013) Offers trekking trips to Cabo Froward, the southernmost point on mainland South America.

**Turismo Aonikenk** (☎ 228332; www.aonikenk.com; Magallanes 619) English-, German- and French-speaking guides.

**Turismo Pali Aike** (☎ 223301; www.turismopaliaike.com; Lautaro Navarro 1129)

**Turismo Pehoe** (☎ 244506; www.pehoe.com; José Menéndez 918)

**Turismo Viento Sur** (☎ 226930; www.vientosur.com; Fagnano 565)

**Turismo Yamana** (☎ 221130; www.yamana.cl; Errazuriz 932) Kayaking trips on Magellan Strait.

**Whale Sound** (☎ 221076; www.whalesound.com; Navarro 1163) Supports science with study-based sailing and kayak trips to the remote Coloane Marine Park.

### Sleeping

The rates at midrange and top-end establishments include breakfast but don't reflect the additional 18% IVA charge, which foreigners in Chile aren't required to pay if paying with US cash, traveler's checks or credit card. Off-season (mid-April to mid-October) rates can drop by up to 40%.

### BUDGET

**Hospedaje Independencia** (☎ 227572; Av Independencia 374; dm CH\$4500, camping CH\$1500) Shoestring travelers pack this cheaper-than-cheap lodging, run by a young couple. Rooms are good, the atmosphere is casual and guests get kitchen use and reasonable bike rentals.

**Hostal La Estancia** (☎ 249130; http://www.backpackerschile.com/en/hostel-estancia.php in English; O'Higgins 765;

dm/d without bathroom CH\$6500/20,000; ☞ ) This rambling old home offers ample rooms and tidy shared bathrooms. Guests benefit from the helpful and warm nature of owners Alex and Carmen. It is nearly always booked, even in off-season. Reserve ahead.

**Hostal Fitz Roy** (☎ 240430; www.hostalfitzroy.com; Lautaro Navarro 850; dm/s/d/tr without bathroom CH\$7000/12,000/20,000/25,000; ☞ ) This country house in the city offers rambling, good-value rooms and an inviting, old-fashioned living room to pore over books or sea charts. Rooms have phones, TVs and wireless connections. Credit cards are accepted.

**El Conventillo** (☎ 242311; www.hostalelconventillo.com; Pasaje Komer 1034; dm CH\$8000; ☞ ) A new addition, this cool brick hostel in the reviving waterfront district has remodeled, carpeted dorms and clean row showers. Bright colors mask the fact that there is little interior light; rooms are windowless. Yogurt and cereal are part of a big breakfast. There's 24-hour reception, a laundry and a library of cool Chilean flicks.

**Hostal La Luna** (☎ 221764; hostalluna@hotmail.com; O'Higgins 424; s/d CH\$8000/12,000; ☞ ) Goose-down comforters and a scruffy tabby spill home at this friendly family lodging. Six tidy rooms have shared bathrooms and guests get kitchen and laundry privileges.

**Hostal del Rey** (☎ 223924; www.chileaustral.com/hdelrey; Fagnano 589; s/d/tr without bathroom CH\$8000/16,000/24,000, d with bathroom CH\$20,000, 2-person apt CH\$24,000) Amid a haphazard decor of indigenous portraits, lace and kitsch, this cramped home features decent rooms with down-comforter beds. Apartments have full kitchens, hot water and TV.

**Hostal Fin del Mundo** (☎ 710185; www.alfindelmundo.cl; O'Higgins 1026; s/d/tr CH\$10,000/20,000/24,000) On the 2nd and 3rd floors of a creaky downtown building, these cheerful rooms share bathrooms with hot showers and a large kitchen, but the shared space is rather dull.

### MIDRANGE

**Hostal Calafate** (☎ 241281; www.calafate.cl in Spanish; Magallanes 922; s/d without bathroom CH\$17,000/27,000, with bathroom CH\$27,000/38,500; ☞ ) This downtown hub bustles with traffic. Guests can choose from a selection of plain but good rooms that are not quite insulated from the street noise below. Perks include phones, TVs and central heating. A continental breakfast is included and there's a popular internet café in the lobby.

**Hostal Carpa Manzano** (☎ 710744; www.hotelcarpa-manzano.com; Lautaro Navarro 336; s/d CH\$30,000/35,000) These snappy-colored rooms feature private bathroom, carpet and cable TV. A comfortable house, it's run more like a hotel, with uniformed staff and a certain formality.

**Hostal de la Patagonia** (☎ 249970; www.ecotourpatagonia.com; O'Higgins 730; s/d CH\$30,000/35,000) This unmistakable turquoise lodging offers a number of sunny rooms with light wood accents, and a decent buffet breakfast.

**Hostal de la Avenida** (☎ 710744; Av Colón 534; s/d CH\$28,000/37,000) Chintzy but cozy, this mustard-yellow home has plants sprouting from a claw-foot tub and other funky installations. The staff is pleasant and there's cable TV and central heating.

**Hostal Terrasur** (☎ 247114; www.hostalerrasur.cl; O'Higgins 123; s/d CH\$28,500/38,500; ☑) The slightly upscale Terrasur nurtures a secret-garden atmosphere, from its rooms with flowing curtains and flower patterns to the miniature green courtyard. There's also friendly desk service.

**Hotel Mercurio** (☎ 242300; www.chileaustral.com/mercurio; Fagnano 595; s/d/tr CH\$45,000/53,000/62,000) A well-kept and proper corner hotel with wide staircases and slightly dated stucco rooms. The staff is bilingual and very accommodating.

**Hotel Plaza** (☎ 241300; www.hotelplaza.cl; Nogueira 1116; s/d CH\$50,000/62,000; ☑) This converted mansion boasts vaulted ceilings, plaza views and historical photos lining the hall. Inconsistent with such grandeur, the country decor is unfortunate. But service is genteel and the location unbeatable.

## TOP END

**Hotel Isla Rey Jorge** (☎ 248220; www.hotelislaorejorge.com; 21 de Mayo 1243; s/d/st CH\$60,000/74,000/100,000; ☑) Elegant and relaxed, this 1918 house exudes character; we just wonder about the canon on the lawn. Traditional British style is flaunted, with 25 attractive rooms and a sun room for reading.

**Hotel José Nogueira** (☎ 248840; www.hotelnogueira.com; Bories 959; s/d CH\$80,000/95,000; ☑) This high-end hotel in the Sara Braun mansion lacks the original grandeur, but staff ghost sightings and the beautiful atrium dining room rescue some of the romance. Modern amenities combine with period furnishings in rooms, and the lobby is wired for wi-fi.

**Hotel Cabo de Hornos** (☎ 242134; www.hoteles-austalis.com/cabo\_hornos/html/ingles.asp; Plaza Muñoz Gamero 1025; s/d CH\$90,000/100,000; ☑) This smart business hotel begins with a cool interior of slate

and sharp angles, but rooms are more relaxed, with bright color accents and top-notch views. The well-heeled bar just beckons you to have a scotch.

## Eating

The port's seasonal seafood is an exquisite treat: go for *centolla* (king crab) between July and November or *erizos* (sea urchins) between November and July. If heading to Torres del Paine, get groceries here beforehand.

**La Carioca** (☎ 224809; José Menéndez 600; sandwiches AR\$2500) Cold lager and sandwiches are the mainstay at this downtown institution.

**Lomit's** (☎ 243399; José Menéndez 722; mains CH\$3000; ☎ 10am-2:30am) Chile's answer to the sidetrack diner is this atmospheric café where cooks flip made-to-order burgers at a center-stage griddle. Portions are generous but the service dallies.

**Sabores** (☎ 227369; Mejicana 702, 2nd fl; mains CH\$3500) Lacking pretension, this cozy café serves up hearty Chilean fare such as grilled fish, seafood stews and pasta to a full house.

**La Marmita** (☎ 222056; Plaza Sampaio 678; mains CH\$5000-8000) Unbeatable for its ambience as well as its tasty fare, Marmita has fresh salads and hearty, home-cooked creations. The two small rooms are cozy and bright and the chef-owners sometimes circulate among guests. For a light main, try Pablo Neruda's *caldillo de congrio* (conger eel soup).

**El Mercado** (☎ 247415; Mejicana 617, 2nd fl; mains CH\$6000; ☎ 24hr) A late-night institution with heaping seafood specials, from scallops stewed in garlicky sauce to *chupe de centolla* (crab casserole). There's a full bar, English menu and cheaper sandwiches.

**Puerto Viejo** (☎ 225103; O'Higgins 1176; mains CH\$5000-8000) With curved walls like a ship's hull and raw-wood details, this chic eatery sets sail with fresh options like hake in cider and warm abalone salad. It isn't cheap but the attention is notable.

**Remezón** (☎ 241029; 21 de Mayo 1469; mains CH\$10,000) Take a cue from locals and start with a tart pisco sour (grape brandy with lemon). Then dive into the chef's game and seafood innovations: oysters and clams au gratin or salmon smoked with black tea, to name a couple. Service is unpretentious and welcoming.

Also recommended:

**Pachamama** (☎ 226171; Magallanes 619-A) Bulk trail-mix munchies and organic products.

**La Luna** (☎ 228555; O'Higgins 974; mains AR\$4000-7000) A wide variety of fresh seafood and pastas.

**La Tasca** (☎ 242807; Plaza Muñoz Gamero 771; mains AR\$4000-8000) In the stylish Casa España, with good views, a set lunch on weekdays and fresh seafood.

## Drinking

**La Taberna** (☎ 241317; Sara Braun Mansion; ☎ 7pm-2am, to 3am weekends) A magnet for travelers, this dark and elegant pub is a classic old-boys' club, with no old boys in sight. Ambience is tops, but the mixed drinks could be better.

**Olijoe Pub** (☎ 223728; Errázuriz 970; ☎ 6pm-2am) Leather booths and mosaic tabletops lend pretension, but this is your usual pub with good beer and bad service. Mix it up with the house special, Glaciar – a mix of pisco, *horchata* (cinnamon rice milk), milk and curaçao.

**El Madero** (Bories 655) A warm-up spot for clubbers, Madero gets packed with crowds sipping stiff drinks.

## Entertainment

**Kamikaze** (☎ 248744; Bories 655; cover CH\$3000 with a free drink) Tiki torches warm up this most southerly dance club and, if you're lucky, the occasional live rock band. It's upstairs from El Madero.

**Cine Estrella** (Mejicana 777) Shows first-run movies.

## Shopping

**Zona Franca** (Zofri; ☎ closed Sun) The duty-free zone is a large, polished conglomeration of shops that is worth checking out if you're looking for electronics, outdoor gear, computer accessories or camera equipment. *Colectivos* shuttle back and forth from downtown along Av Bulnes throughout the day.

## Getting There & Away

The tourist offices distribute a useful brochure which details all forms of transport available.

### AIR

Punta Arenas' airport (PUQ) is 21km north of town.

**LanChile** (☎ 241100, 600-526-2000; www.lan.com; Lautaro Navarro 999) flies several times daily to Santiago (CH\$194,000) with a stop in Puerto Montt (CH\$124,000), and on Saturday to the Falkland Islands (CH\$250,000 round-trip). A new service goes direct to Ushuaia (CH\$107,500) three times a week. For national flights, book ahead online for the best deals.

Smaller **Aerolíneas del Sur/Air Comet** (☎ 227776; Roca 809) offers direct, nonstop flights twice daily between Santiago and Punta Arenas (CH\$90,000). **Sky Airline** (☎ in Santiago 02-353-3169, 600-600-2828, in Punta Arenas 710645; Roca 935; www.skyairline.cl in Spanish) flies daily between Santiago and Punta Arenas, with a stop in either Puerto Montt or Concepción. At the time of research **Aerolíneas Argentina** (☎ 0810-222-8657; www.aerolineas.com.ar) had added an office in Punta Arenas, offering flights from various cities in Argentina.

From November to March, **Aerovías DAP** (☎ 223340, airport 213776; www.dap.cl; O'Higgins 891) flies to Porvenir (CH\$19,000) Monday through Saturday, and to Puerto Williams (CH\$52,000) Wednesday through Saturday and Monday. Luggage is limited to 10kg per person. DAP also offers charter flights over Cape Horn (seven-passenger plane CH\$1,825,000) and to other Patagonian destinations, including Ushuaia and El Calafate. Charters to Chile's Teniente Marsh air base in Antarctica tour Base Frei (one/two days CH\$1,250,000/1,750,000); weather depending, the schedule permits one night in Antarctica before returning to Punta Arenas.

### BOAT

The car ferry *Melinka*, operated by **Transbordador Austral Broom** (☎ 218100; www.tabsa.cl in Spanish; Av Bulnes 05075), sails to Porvenir in Tierra del Fuego (CH\$4300, 2½ to four hours) from the Tres Puentes ferry terminal north of town; catch taxi *colectivos* in front of Museo Regional Braun-Menéndez. Boats usually depart in the early morning and return in the late afternoon; schedules and travel time depend on the mercurial weather. Make reservations to ferry your vehicle (CH\$28,000) by calling the office.

A faster way to get to Tierra del Fuego is the Punta Delgada-Bahía Azul ('Cruce Primera Angostura') crossing, northeast of Punta Arenas. Broom ferries (CH\$1500, 20 minutes) sail every 90 minutes between 8:30am and 10pm. Call ahead for vehicle reservations (CH\$12,000).

Broom is also the agent for ferries from Tres Puentes to Puerto Williams (reclining seat/bunk CH\$72,500/87,500 including meals, 38 hours), on Isla Navarino. Ferries sail three or four times per month on Wednesday only, returning Saturday, both at 7pm. Trust us, the extra cost of a bunk is worthwhile.

## THE FALKLAND ISLANDS/ISLAS MALVINAS

☎ 500 / pop 3200 permanent nonmilitary, 600,000 sheep

The sheep boom in Tierra del Fuego and Patagonia owes its origins to a cluster of islands 500km to the east in the South Atlantic Ocean. Known as Las Islas Malvinas to the Argentines or the Falkland Islands to the British, they had been explored, but never fully captured the interest of either country until Europe's mid-19th-century wool boom. After the Falkland Islands Company (FIC) became the islands' largest landholder, the islands' population of stranded gauchos and mariners grew rapidly with the arrival of English and Scottish immigrants. In an unusual exchange, in 1853 the South American Missionary Society began transporting Yaghan Indians from Tierra del Fuego to Keppel Island to catechize them.

Argentina has laid claim to the islands since 1833, but it wasn't until 1982 that Argentine President Leopoldo Galtieri, then drowning in economic chaos and allegations of corruption, decided that reclaiming the islands would unite his country behind him. However, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher (also suffering in the polls) didn't hesitate in striking back, thoroughly humiliating Argentina in what became known as the Falklands War. A severe blow to Argentina's nationalist pride, the ill-fated war succeeded in severing all diplomatic ties between the two nations.

On July 14, 1999, a joint statement issued by the British, Falkland Islands and Argentine governments promised closer cooperation on areas of economic mutual interest. In August 2001, British Prime Minister Tony Blair visited Argentina in an effort to further improve ties between the countries. Nevertheless, relations with Argentina remain cool, with most South American trade going via Chile.

Besides their status as an unusually polemical piece of property, what do the Falklands offer the intrepid traveler? Bays, inlets, estuaries and beaches create a tortuous, attractive coastline flanked by abundant wildlife. Striated and crested caracaras, cormorants, oystercatchers, snowy sheathbills and a plethora of penguins – Magellanic, rockhopper, macaroni, gentoo and king – share top billing with elephant seals, sea lions, fur seals, five dolphin species and killer whales.

Stanley (population 2000), the islands' capital on East Falkland, is an assemblage of brightly painted metal-clad houses and a good place to throw down a few pints and listen to island lore. 'Camp' – as the rest of the islands are known – hosts settlements that began as company towns (hamlets where coastal shipping could collect wool) and now provide rustic backcountry lodging and a chance to experience pristine nature and wildlife. Though there are 400km of roads, the islands have no street lights.

## Planning

The best time to visit is from October to March, when migratory birds (including penguins) and marine mammals return to the beaches and headlands. The first cruise ships to South Georgia and Antarctica turn up in early November and the last ones depart around the end of March. It's worth visiting during the annual sports meetings, which feature horse racing, bull riding and sheepdog trials. The events take place in Stanley between Christmas and New Year, and on East and West Falkland at the end of the shearing season, usually in late February. Summer never gets truly hot (the maximum high is 24°C or 75°F), but high winds can bring a chill to the air. For more details, pick up Lonely Planet's *Falklands & South Georgia Island* guide.

## Information

Stanley's **Jetty Visitors Centre** (☎ 27019; jettycentre@horizon.co.fk), at the public jetty on Ross Rd, distributes excellent brochures describing activities in and around Stanley. The *Visitor Accommodation Guide* lists lodgings and camping areas around the Islands. Another helpful source of information is **Falkland Islands Tourism** (☎ 22215; www.visitorfalklands.com). In the UK, contact **Falkland House** (☎ 020-7222-2542; www.falklandislands.com; 14 Broadway, Westminster, London SW1H 0BH).

## Visas & Documents

Visitors from Britain and Commonwealth countries, the EU, North America, Mercosur countries and Chile don't need visas. If coming from another country, check with the British Consulate. All

nationalities must carry a valid passport, an onward ticket, and proof of sufficient funds (credit cards are fine) and pre-arranged accommodations. In practice, arrivals who don't have prebooked accommodations are held in the arrivals area while rooms are found.

## Money

There's no ATM on the Falklands and only one bank in Stanley, so bring plenty of cash. Pounds sterling and US dollars in cash or traveler's checks are readily accepted, but the exchange rate for US currency is low. There's no need to change money to Falkland pounds (Fk£), which are not accepted off the islands. In peak season, expect to spend US\$150 to US\$300 per day, not including airfare; less if camping or staying in self-catering cottages.

## Getting There & Away

From South America, **LanChile** (www.lan.com) flies to Mt Pleasant International Airport (MPA; near Stanley) every Saturday from Santiago, Chile, via Puerto Montt, Punta Arenas and – one Saturday each month – Rio Gallegos, Argentina. Roundtrip fares are CH\$525,000 from Santiago and CH\$250,000 from Punta Arenas with advance booking.

From **RAF Brize Norton** (www.raf.mod.uk/rafbrizenorton), in Oxfordshire, England, there are regular Royal Airforce flights to Mt Pleasant (18 hours, including a two-hour refueling stop on tiny Ascension Island in the South Atlantic). One-way fares are UK£949/1530/1550 for 30-day advance purchase/standard/business class. Travelers continuing on to Chile can purchase one-way tickets for half the fare. Bookings from the UK can be made through the **Falkland Islands Government Office** (☎ 020-7222-2542; fax 020-7222-2375; travel@figo.u-net.com; Falkland House, 14 Broadway, Westminster, London SW1H 0BH). Payment can be by cash or by personal or bank cheque; credit cards are not accepted. On each flight only 28 seats are reserved for nonmilitary personnel.

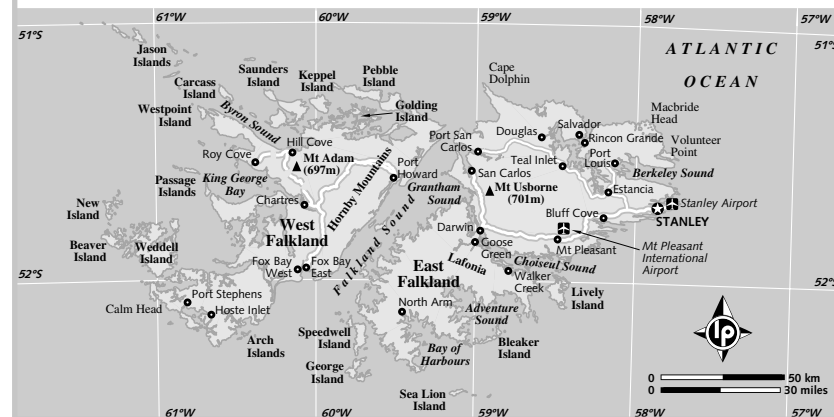
## Getting Around

From Stanley, **Figas** (☎ 27219; figas.fig@horizon.co.fk) serves outlying destinations in eight-seater aircraft. Travel within the Falklands costs around US\$2 per minute.

Several Stanley operators run day trips to East Falkland settlements, including **Discovery Tours** (☎ 21027; www.discoveryfalklands.com), **Ten Acre Tours** (☎ 21155; www.tenacretours.horizon.co.fk) and **South Atlantic Marine Services** (☎ 21145; www.falklands-underwater.com).

**Falkland Frontiers** (☎ 51561; falklandfrontiers@horizon.co.fk) conducts fishing and wildlife tours. **Adventure Falklands** (☎ 21383; pwatts@horizon.co.fk) specializes in wildlife (featuring king, gentoo and Magellanic penguins) and historical tours.

Trekking and camping are feasible; however, there are no designated trails and getting lost is not unheard of. Always seek permission before entering private land.



From September to May, **Cruceros Australis** (☎ in Santiago 02-442-3110; www.australis.com) runs breathtakingly scenic four- to seven-day luxury cruises aboard the 130-passenger *MV Mare Australis* and brand-new *MV Via Australis*, from Punta Arenas through the Cordillera de Darwin, Parque Nacional Alberto de Agostini, the Beagle Channel and Puerto Williams to Ushuaia (Argentina), and back. Rates for three nights start from CH\$495,000 per person (double occupancy) in low season (September–October and mid-March–April) and reach CH\$1,100,000 for a high-season single. Most passengers only sail one leg. Departures from Ushuaia include a possibility of disembarking at Cape Horn. Turismo Comapa (p501) handles local bookings.

**Navimag** (☎ 200200; www.navimag.com; Magallanes 990), which runs ferries from Puerto Natales to Puerto Montt via the spectacular Chilean fjords, is also represented by Comapa. For fares and schedules, see p511.

## BUS

A central terminal is perennially promised. In the meantime, buses depart from company offices, most within a block or two of Av Colón. Buy tickets at least a couple of hours (if not a day or two during summer) in advance. The **Central de Pasajeros** (☎ 245811; cnr Magallanes & Av Colón) is the closest thing to a central booking office.

For Ushuaia, Ghisoni continues direct, but travelers report Pacheco stops too long in Río Grande. In Río Grande, minivans (Lider or Transportes Montiel) go to Ushuaia throughout the day and may cost slightly less (depending on exchange rates) than a through ticket.

Companies and daily destinations include the following:

**Bus Sur** (☎ 614224; www.bus-sur.cl; José Menéndez 552) El Calafate, Puerto Natales, Río Gallegos, Río Turbio, Ushuaia, Puerto Montt.

**Bus Transfer** (☎ 229613; Pedro Montt 966) Puerto Natales and airport transfers.

**Buses Fernández/Buses Pingüino** (☎ 221429/812; www.busesfernandez.com; Armando Sanhueza 745) Puerto Natales, Torres del Paine, Río Gallegos.

**Buses Ghisoni/Queilen Bus** (☎ 222714; Lautaro Navarro 975) Río Gallegos, Río Grande, Ushuaia, Puerto Montt.

**Buses Pacheco** (☎ 225527; www.busespacheco.com; Av Colón 900) Puerto Natales, Puerto Montt, Río Grande, Río Gallegos, Ushuaia.

**Tecni-Austral** (☎ 222078; Lautaro Navarro 975) Río Grande.

**Turibus** (☎ 222970; www.busescruzdelsur.cl in Spanish; Armando Sanhueza 745) Puerto Montt, Osorno, Chiloé.

Destination	Cost (CH\$)	Duration (hr)
Puerto Montt	40,000	36
Puerto Natales	4000	3
Río Gallegos	7000	5-8
Río Grande	15,000	7
Ushuaia	24,000	10

## Getting Around

### TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

To get to Puerto Natales, there's no need to go into town since buses depart directly from the airport. **Turismo Sandy Point** (☎ 222241; Pedro Montt 840) runs door-to-door shuttle services (CH\$3000) to/from town to coincide with flights. Buses Fernández does regular airport transfers (AR\$2500), and Aerovías DAP also provides a shuttle service (CH\$1500).

## BUS & COLECTIVO

Taxi *colectivos*, with numbered routes, are only slightly more expensive than buses (about CH\$450, a bit more late at night and on Sundays), far more comfortable and much quicker.

## CAR

Cars are a good option for exploring Torres del Paine, but renting one in Chile to cross the border into Argentina can become prohibitively expensive due to international insurance requirements. If heading for El Calafate, it is best to rent your vehicle in Argentina. Purchasing a car to explore Patagonia has its drawbacks, as Chilean Patagonia has no through roads that link northern and southern Patagonia, so it is entirely dependent on the roads of Argentina or expensive ferry travel.

Punta Arenas has Chilean Patagonia's most economical rental rates, and locally owned agencies tend to provide better service. Recommended **Adel Rent a Car/Localiza** (☎ 235471/2, 09-882-7569; www.adelrentacar.cl; Pedro Montt 962) provides attentive service, competitive rates, airport pickup and good travel tips. Other choices include **Budget** (☎ 225983; O'Higgins 964), **Hertz** (☎ 248742; O'Higgins 987) and **Lubag** (☎ 242023; Magallanes 970).

## AROUND PUNTA ARENAS Penguin Colonies

There are two substantial Magellanic penguin colonies near Punta Arenas. Easier to reach is **Seno Otway** (Otway Sound), with about 6000 breeding pairs, about an hour northwest of the city. The larger (50,000 breeding pairs) and more interesting **Monumento Natural Los Pingüinos** is accessible only by boat to Isla Magdalena in the Strait of Magellan (see above). Neither are as impressive as the larger penguin colonies in Argentina or the Falkland Islands. Tours to Seno Otway usually leave in the afternoon; however, visiting in the morning is best for photography because the birds are mostly backlit in the afternoon.

Since there is no scheduled public transport to either site, it's necessary to rent a car or join a tour. Admission to Seno Otway is CH\$2000, while admission to Isla Magdalena is included in the tour price. Of the two options, the trip to Isla Magdalena is more often recommended.

## Río Verde

☎ 61 / pop 300

About 50km north of Punta Arenas, a graveled lateral leads northwest toward Seno Skyring (Skyring Sound), passing this former sector of *estancias* before rejoining Ruta 9 at Villa Tehuelches at Km 100. Only visitors with a car should consider this interesting detour to one of the region's best-maintained assemblages of Magellanic architecture.

Ranch life spills from the pores of **Estancia Río Verde** (☎ 311131, 311123; www.estanciarioverde.cl; Ruta Y50, Km 97; d CH\$47,500), an interesting stop on the shores of Seno Skyring. English-speaking hosts Josefina and Sergio keep a relaxed atmosphere and manage to be gracious hosts while running the ranch hands-on. A ride around the property affords a close look at operations on this sheep *estancia* that also breeds fine Chilean horses. Several times each summer there are rodeos at the *medialuna* (a traditional half-moon stadium). Sailing, fishing and sightseeing trips are also arranged. Guests stay in a beautiful restored *casco* with 14 rooms with private bathrooms. The kitchen cooks up regional delicacies, including Patagonian lamb, with fresh bread, garden vegetables and plenty of wine. Passersby can stop for lunch (CH\$5000) and check out

the small museum. It's 43km north of Punta Arenas via Ruta 9; follow gravel road Y50 to Km 97.

## Río Rubens

Roughly midway between Villa Tehuelches and Puerto Natales on blustery, paved Ruta 9, Río Rubens is a fine trout-fishing area and, for travelers with their own transport, an ideal spot to break the 250km journey from Punta Arenas.

**Hotel Río Rubens** (☎ 09-640-1583; Ruta 9, Km 183; s/d/cabins CH\$10,000/15,000/40,000) is a comfy, welcoming, old country-style inn that offers good rates but can be hard to get a hold of. The restaurant serves outstanding meals, including lamb and seafood.

## Parque Nacional Pali Aike

Rugged volcanic steppe pocked with craters, caves and twisted formations, Pali Aike, translated from the Tehuelche language, means 'devil's country.' This dry and desolate landscape is a 50-sq-km park along the Argentine border, west of the Monte Aymond border crossing to Río Gallegos. Lava rocks can be red, yellow or green-gray, depending on their mineral content. Fauna includes abundant guanacos, ñandús, gray foxes, armadillos and bats. In the 1930s Junius Bird's excavations at 17m-deep **Cueva Pali Aike** (Pali Aike Cave) yielded the first Paleo-Indian artifacts associated with extinct New World fauna such as the milodón and the native horse *Onohippidium*.

The **park** (admission CH\$1000) has several hiking trails, including a 1.7km path through the rugged lava beds of the **Escorial del Diablo** to the impressive **Crater Morada del Diablo**; wear sturdy shoes or your feet could be shredded. There are hundreds of craters, some as high as a four-story building. There's also a 9km trail from Cueva Pali Aike to **Laguna Ana**, where there's another shorter trail to a site on the main road, 5km from the park entrance.

The **portería** (entrance gate) has a basic **refugio** (CH\$6000) that holds four guests. Parque Nacional Pali Aike is 200km north-east of Punta Arenas via Ch (rural road) 9, Ch 255 and a graveled secondary road from Cooperativa Villa O'Higgins, 11km north of Estancia Kimiri Aike. There's also an access road from the Chilean border post at Monte Aymond. There is no public transport, but





its adoptable hostess, Nancy, this two-story home offers lived-in rooms with kitchen privileges and internet access. It's a family environment, with twin or double beds available with shared bathroom.

**Backpacker's Magallania** (☎ 414950; Tomás Rogers 255; dm CH\$6000) A sleeping bag is handy for these bargain bunks. The owner is well disposed and the decor is quirky, but dorms fill up fast. Guests get kitchen privileges.

**Los Inmigrantes** (☎ 413482; Pinto 480; per person CH\$7000) This *residencial* (budget accommodation) and rental center is a smart choice for dedicated hikers seeking the inside scoop on trails. Kitchen privileges are available.

**Patagonia Aventura** (☎ 411028; Tomás Rogers 179; dm/d CH\$7500/18,000) On the plaza, this comfortable full-service hostel has small, ambient rooms, an attached gear shop and a good café with creative fare. Breakfasts include fresh homemade bread.

**Hostel Natales** (☎ 0410081; www.hostelnatales.cl; Ladrilleros 209; dm/d/tr CH\$9000/25,000/33,000; ☑) This tranquil green inn boasts tasteful and toasty rooms, decked out in neutrals, all with private bathroom. It doesn't have the energy of other hostels, but dorms are good value. Guests can use the internet terminals in the lobby.

**Residencial Bernardita** (☎ 411162; O'Higgins 765; s/d CH\$9000/18,000) Guests highly recommend Bernardita's quiet rooms and good service. There's also kitchen use and breakfast. Choose between rooms in the main house or more private ones in the back annex.

**Hostal Dos Lagunas** (☎ 415733; Barros Arana 104; r per person CH\$10,000) Natales natives Alejandro and Andrea are attentive hosts, spoiling guests with filling breakfasts, steady water pressure and travel tips. The rooms are ample and warm; singles occupying a double pay CH\$5000 extra.

## MIDRANGE

**Amerindia B&B** (☎ 411945; www.hostelamerindia.com; Barros Arana 135; s/d/tr without bathroom CH\$15,000/20,000/30,000, d with bathroom CH\$30,000; ☑) With hand weavings, an earthy palette and retro touches, this guesthouse is a stylish retreat. Breakfast includes homemade bread and fruit. Guests can use the backyard grill, there's laundry service, and new doubles with bathrooms are on offer.

**Casa Cecilia** (☎ 613560; www.casaceciliahostal.com; Tomás Rogers 60; d with/without bathroom CH\$30,000/20,000;

☒) Well kept and central, Cecilia is a reliable mainstay with good showers, helpful service and homemade wheat toast for breakfast. The only drawbacks are a small kitchen and cramped rooms. Its multilingual owners can provide good tips and there's quality camping gear for hire.

**Erratic Rock II** (☎ 412317; www.erraticrock2.com; Benjamin Zamora 732; d CH\$25,000; ☑) Ideal for couples, this cozy home offers spacious doubles in soft neutrals with throw pillows and tidy new bathrooms. Breakfasts in the bright dining room are abundant and guests can prepare coffee or tea on a whim.

**Cuatro Elementos** (☎ 415751; www.4elementos.cl in Spanish; Esmeralda 813; s/d/tr CH\$20,000/25,000/37,000) Rooms are few and spare in this eco-friendly house crafted of recycled zinc, driftwood and old woodstoves. A strong commitment to recycling makes this hostel unique, and it also offers guided trips with an ecological bent to Torres del Paine and other trekking destinations. There's no sign: find the Japanese characters marking the entrance and follow the smell of baking bread.

## TOP END

**Hotel Indigo** (☎ 418718; www.indigopatagonia.com; Ladrilleros 105; d/standard/ste CH\$97,500/110,000/132,500; ☒) A pampered finale to your trip. Hikers head first to Indigo's rooftop Jacuzzis and spa, but restful spaces abound, from the dark hallways dotted with hammocks to plush rooms with down duvets and candles lit for your return. Materials like eucalyptus, slate and iron overlap the modern with the natural for an interesting effect. Standard corner rooms are slightly more spacious than doubles, with two window views. Service is attentive, but the main star here is the fjord in front of you, which even captures your gaze in the shower.

**remota** (☎ 414040; bookings 02-387-1500; www.remota.cl; Ruta 9, Km 1.5; 3 nights s/d CH\$840,000/1,160,000; ☑) Unlike most hotels, the exclusive remota draws your awareness to what's outside: silence broadcasts the gusty winds, irregular window patterns imitate old stock fences and a crooked passageway pays tribute to *estancia* sheep corridors. This vast postmodern addition to Puerto Natales offers sumptuous but spare comfort. Though rooms are cozy, you'll probably want to spend all your time at 'the beach,' a glass-walled barn room with lounge futons to gape at the wild surroundings.

## Eating

**La Picada de Don Carlitos** (☎ 414232; Blanco Encalada 444; menú del día CH\$2000) Hearty Chilean fare, like chicken stew and heaped mashed potatoes, is served at this down-home eatery bursting with locals at lunchtime.

**El Living** (Arturo Prat 156; mains CH\$3500) Homemade soups and gourmet teas and coffee make this gringo den with comfy couches worth a leisurely stop.

**Afrignia** (☎ 412232; Eberhard 343; mains CH\$4200) If you're bored with local fare, try this romantic gem. Run by a Zambian/Chilean couple, its offerings include tasty mint lamb brochettes or chicken with creamy ginger sauce, spiced to your wishes.

**La Mesita Grande** (Arturo Prat 196; pizzas CH\$5000; ☒ lunch & dinner) Happy diners share one long, worn table for outstanding thin-crust pizzas, quality pastas and organic salads. Toppings have a twist, like arugula and prosciutto or lemon-spiked salmon.

**El Pez Glaciar** (Ladrilleros 105; mains CH\$5000) Attached to Hotel Indigo, this sleek seafood restaurant emphasizes freshness: the fish on your plate was probably hauled in with that morning's catch. Pared-down but creative preparations showcase the distinct flavor of each dish, from sesame conger eel to crisp silverside. Don't miss the spicy Peruvian seviche.

**Asador Patagónico** (☎ 413553; Arturo Prat 158; mains CH\$8000) If trekking has left you with a mastodon appetite, splurge on flame-seared lamb, steak and salads at this upscale grill on the plaza.

Shoppers can hit **40 y 20 Fruta Seca** (☎ 210661; Baquedano 443) for dried fruits and nuts perfect for the trail. **Super Mix** (☎ 210661; Bulnes s/n) has groceries.

## Drinking

**El Bar de Ruperto** (☎ 410863; cnr Bulnes & Magallanes; ☑) Ideal for a rainy day, this typical bar entertains you with foosball, chess and other board games. Guinness and other imports help you forget you're so far from home.

**Pisco Sour** (Ladrilleros 105, 2nd fl; ☒ 10am-11pm; ☑) For sunset cocktails, hit this stylish bar in the Hotel Indigo complex, with gaping views of the mountain-clad sound. Innovations on the bar's namesake drink shouldn't be missed: try the Nippon pisco sour (spiked with green tea).

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

**Aerovías DAP** (www.dap.cl) offers charter flights to El Calafate, Argentina, from the small airfield (PNT), a few kilometers north of town on the road to Torres del Paine. The closest LanChile office is in Punta Arenas (p503).

### BOAT

For many travelers, a journey through Chile's spectacular fjords aboard Navimag's car and passenger ferry becomes a highlight of their trip. This four-day and three-night northbound voyage has become so popular it should be booked well in advance.

You can also try your luck. To confirm when the ferry is due, contact Turismo Comapa (p508) a couple of days before your estimated arrival date. The *Magallanes* leaves Natales early on Friday and stops in Puerto Edén (or the advancing Glaciar Pía XI on southbound sailings) en route to Puerto Montt. It usually arrives in Natales in the morning of the same day and departs either later that day or on the following day, but schedules vary according to weather conditions and tides. Disembarking passengers must stay on board while cargo is transported; those embarking have to spend the night on board.

High season is November to March, mid-season is October and April, and low season is May to September. Most folks end up in dorm-style, 22-bed berths, but often wish they had sprung for a private cabin. Fares vary according to view, cabin size and private or shared bathroom, and include all meals (including veggie options if requested while booking, but bring water, snacks and drinks anyway) and interpretive talks. Per-person fares range from CH\$170,000 for a bunk berth in low season to CH\$975,000 for a triple-A cabin in high season; students and seniors receive a 10% to 15% discount. Check online (www.navimag.com) for current schedules and rates.

### BUS

Puerto Natales has no central bus terminal, though several companies stop at the junction of Valdivia and Baquedano. In high season book at least a day ahead, especially for early-morning departures. Services are greatly reduced in the off-season.

A new road has been opened to Torres del Paine and, although gravel, it is much more direct. For now the only transportation service using it is Via Terra, but look for others to follow soon. This alternative entrance goes alongside Lago del Toro to the Administración (park headquarters).

Otherwise, for Torres del Paine, most buses leave two to three times daily at around 7am, 8am and 2:30pm. If you are headed to Mountain Lodge Paine Grande in the off-season, take the morning bus (CH\$8000) to meet the catamaran (CH\$11,000 one way, two hours). These schedules are in constant flux, so double-check them before heading out.

Bus Sur goes to Río Gallegos, Argentina, on Tuesday and Thursday; El Pingüino goes at 11am Wednesday and Sunday. To El Calafate, Zaahj, Cootra and Bus Sur have the most services.

Companies and destinations include the following:

**Bus Sur** (☎ 614221; www.bus-sur.cl in Spanish; Baquedano 658) Punta Arenas, Torres del Paine, Puerto Montt, El Calafate, Río Turbio, Ushuaia.

**Buses Fernández/El Pingüino** (☎ 411111; www.busesfernandez.com; cnr Esmeralda & Ramírez) Torres del Paine, Punta Arenas.

**Buses Gomez** (☎ 411971; www.busesgomez.com in Spanish; Arturo Prat 234) Torres del Paine.

**Buses JB** (☎ 412824; busesjb@hotmail.com; Arturo Prat 258) Torres del Paine.

**Buses Pacheco** (☎ 414513; www.busespacheco.com; Baquedano 244) Punta Arenas, Río Grande and Ushuaia.

**Cootra** (☎ 412785; Baquedano 456) Goes to El Calafate daily at 7:30am.

**Turismo Zaahj** (☎ 412260/355; www.turismozaahj.co.cl in Spanish; Arturo Prat 236/270) Torres del Paine, El Calafate.

Destination	Cost (CH\$)	Duration (hr)
El Calafate	11,000	5
Punta Arenas	4000	2-3
Torres del Paine	8000	2
Ushuaia	28,000	12

### Getting Around

Car rental is expensive and availability is limited; you'll get better rates in Punta Arenas or Argentina. Try **Emsa/Avis** (☎ 241182; Bulnes 632). **World's End** (☎ 414725; Blanco Encalada 226-A) rents bikes.

## CUEVA DEL MILODÓN

Just 24km northwest of Puerto Natales, Hermann Eberhard discovered the remains of an enormous ground sloth in the 1890s. Nearly 4m tall, the herbivorous milodón survived on the succulent leaves of small trees and branches, but became extinct in the late Pleistocene. The 30m-high **cave** (admission CH\$4000) pays homage to its former inhabitant with a life-size plastic replica of the animal. It's not exactly tasteful, but still worth a stop, whether to appreciate the grand setting and ruminate over its wild past or to take an easy walk up to a lookout point.

Camping (no fires) and picnicking are possible. Torres del Paine buses pass the entrance, which is 8km from the cave proper. There are infrequent tours from Puerto Natales; alternatively, you can hitchhike or share a taxi (CH\$15,000). Outside of high season, bus services are infrequent.

## PARQUE NACIONAL BERNARDO O'HIGGINS

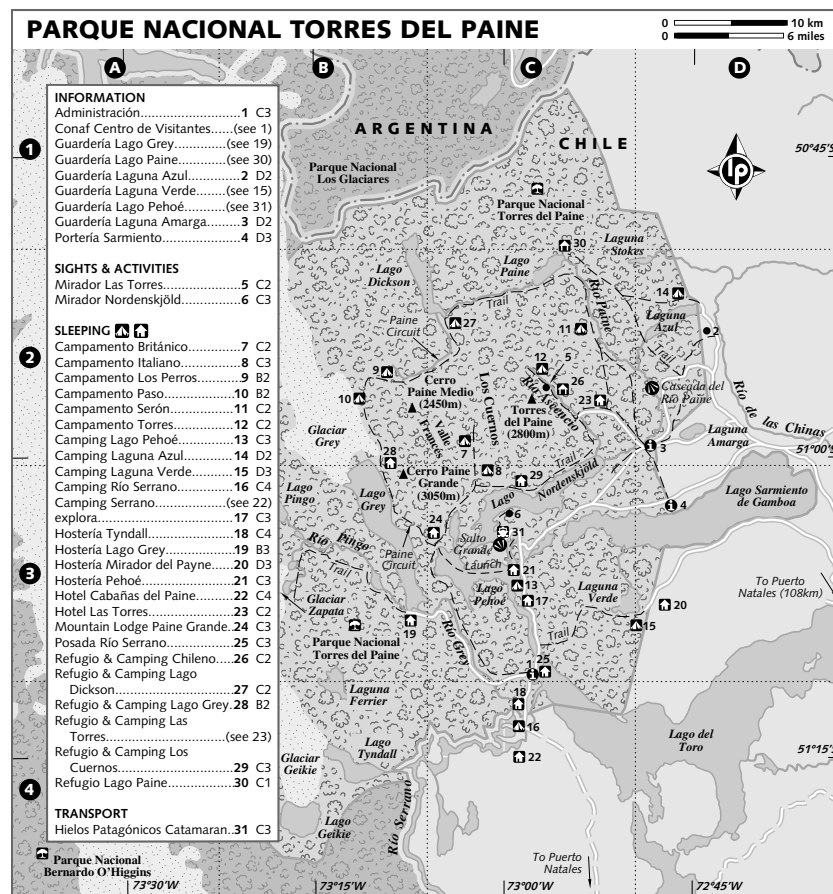
Virtually inaccessible, O'Higgins remains the elusive and exclusive home of glaciers and waterfowl. The national park can only be entered by boat. Full-day boat excursions (CH\$45,000 without lunch) to the base of Glaciar Serrano are run by **Turismo 21 de Mayo** (☎ 061-411978; www.turismo21demayo.cl in Spanish; Eberhard 560, Puerto Natales) and longer trips by **Path@gone** (☎ 061-413290/1; www.pathagone.com; Eberhard 595, Puerto Natales).

You can access Torres del Paine via boat to Glaciar Serrano. Passengers transfer to a Zodiac (a rubber boat with a motor), stop for lunch at Estancia Balmaceda (CH\$12,000) and continue up Río Serrano, arriving at the southern border of the park by 5pm. The same tour can be done leaving the park, but may require camping near Río Serrano to catch the Zodiac at 9am. The trip costs CH\$75,000 with Turismo 21 de Mayo or **Onas Patagonia** (☎ 061-413290/1; www.pathagone.com; Eberhard 595, Puerto Natales).

## PARQUE NACIONAL TORRES DEL PAINE

☎ 61

Soaring almost vertically to nearly 3000m above the Patagonian steppe, the Torres del Paine (Towers of Paine) are spectacular granite pillars that dominate the landscape of what may be South America's finest **national park**



(www.pntp.cl in Spanish; admission high/low season in Chilean pesos only CH\$15,000/5000).

Before its creation in 1959, the park was part of a large sheep *estancia*, and it's still recovering from nearly a century of over-exploitation of its pastures, forests and wildlife. Part of Unesco's Biosphere Reserve system since 1978, it shelters flocks of ostrich-like rheas (known locally as ñandús), Andean condors, flamingos and many other bird species. The park's conservation success is most evident with the guanaco (*Lama guanicoe*), which grazes the open steppe where its predator, the puma, cannot approach undetected. After over a decade of effective protection from poachers, the large and growing herds

of guanacos don't even flinch when humans or vehicles approach.

For hikers and trekkers, this 1810-sq-km park is an unequaled destination. Weather can be wildly changeable. Some say you get four seasons in a day here, and sudden rainstorms and knock-down gusts are part of the hearty initiation. Bring high-quality foul-weather gear, a synthetic sleeping bag and, if you're camping, a good tent.

Guided day trips from Puerto Natales are possible, but permit only a bus-window glimpse of what the park has to offer. Instead, plan to spend anywhere from three to seven days to enjoy the hiking and other activities.



and the eastern part managed by Hostería Las Torres (Refugio Los Cuernos is the approximate cut-off). **Baqueano Zamora** (☎ 413953; www.baqueanozamora.com in Spanish; Baquedano 534, Puerto Natales) runs excursions to Lagos Pingo, Paine and Azul, and Laguna Amarga (half-day CH\$27,500, lunch included).

## Sleeping & Eating

Make reservations! Arriving without them, especially in high season, limits you to camping in the few free options. Travel agencies offer reservations, but it's best to deal directly with the various management companies. **Path@gone/Andescape** (☎ 413290/1; Eberhard 595, Puerto Natales) manages Lagos Grey and Dickson. **Vertice Patagonia** (☎ 412742; www.verticepatagonia.cl) owns and runs Mountain Lodge Paine Grande. **Fantastico Sur** (☎ 710050; www.fantastico.cl) owns Las Torres, Chileno and Los Cuernos, and their associated campgrounds.

Some *refugios* may require photo ID (ie a passport) upon check-in. Photocopy your tourist card and passport for all lodgings in advance to expedite check-in. Staff can radio ahead to confirm your next reservation. Given the huge volume of trekkers, snags are inevitable, so practice your Zen composure.

## CAMPING

Camping at the *refugios* costs CH\$4000 per site. *Refugios* rent equipment – tent (CH\$7000 per night), sleeping bag (CH\$4500) and mat (CH\$1500) – but potential shortages in high season make it prudent to pack your own gear. Small kiosks sell expensive pasta, soup packets and butane gas. Sites administered by Conaf are free and very basic. Many campers have reported wildlife (in rodent form) lurking around campsites, so don't leave food in packs or in tents – hang it from a tree instead.

## REFUGIOS

*Refugio* rooms have four to eight bunk beds each, kitchen privileges (for lodgers and during specific hours only), hot showers and meals. A bed costs CH\$12,500 to CH\$17,500, sleeping-bag rental CH\$4500, and meals CH\$4000 to CH\$7500. Should a *refugio* be overbooked, staff provide all necessary camping equipment. Most *refugios* close by the end of April. Mountain Lodge Paine Grande is the

only one that stays open year-round, but it has very limited operations.

## HOTELS & HOSTERÍAS

The following have high-season prices listed.

**Mountain Lodge Paine Grande** (☎ 412742; www.verticepatagonia.cl; dm CH\$20,600, full board CH\$38,000, camping per person CH\$3500; 📶) Sometimes referred to as Pehoe (its predecessor), this boxy hotel reveals a smart interior made to give sublime Los Cuernos views to all rooms. Between Lago Grey and Valle Francés, it is a perfect day hike from either. It can also be reached by boat across Lago Pehoe. The lodge is partially open year-round and is a godsend to cold, wet winter hikers. It also offers camping.

**Posada Río Serrano** (☎ 02-193-0338, 061-613531 in Puerto Natales; www.baqueanozamora.com in Spanish; dm CH\$15,000, d with/without bathroom CH\$55,000/40,000) Restored but still rustic, this rambling 19th-century ranch house has 13 rooms, a restaurant, a bar and a cozy living room focused on a fireplace. It's a popular base camp for horseback riding (arranged through the same company that owns the posada) and fishing trips to nearby lakes and rivers.

**Hotel Tyndall** (☎ 239401; www.hoteltyndall.com; d CH\$70,000-80,000) This smart wooden lodge on the Río Serrano offers rooms or fully equipped cabins, as well as excursions for guests.

**Hotel Cabañas del Paine** (☎ 220174; www.cabanaspaine.cl; d CH\$75,000-100,000) On the banks of the Río Serrano, these modern wood cabins have hardwood details and offer views of the Paine massif and river. Access is via the new road into the park.

**Hostería Pehoe** (☎ 244506, 248888; www.pehoe.com; d CH\$80,000-90,000) On the far side of Lago Pehoe, toward Explora, this *hostería* is linked to the mainland by a long footbridge. It enjoys five-star panoramas of Los Cuernos and Paine Grande, but unfortunately the rooms are a bit dated. The restaurant and bar are open to the public.

**Hostería Lago Grey** (☎ 225986; www.lagogrey.cl; booking address Lautaro Navarro 1061, Punta Arenas; d CH\$90,000-100,000) Although at the outlet of ice-berg-dotted Lago Grey, the crowded rooms at this year-round retreat are cut off from the views by thick windbreaking trees. The café (open to the public), however, overlooks the grandeur. Zodiac boat tours are available on the lake, but not to the glacier.

**Hostería Mirador del Payne** (☎ 226930; www.miradorpayne.com; booking address Fagnano 585, Punta Arenas; s/d/tr CH\$80,000/97,500/108,000) On the Estancia El Lazo in the seldom-seen Laguna Verde sector, this comfortable inn is known for its serenity, proximity to spectacular viewpoints and top-rate service – but not for easy park access. Activities include bird watching, horseback riding and sport fishing. Call to arrange a ride from the road junction.

**Hotel Las Torres** (☎ 710050; www.lastorres.com; booking address Magallanes 960, Punta Arenas; d CH\$635,000-1,463,000) A luxurious choice just 7km west of Guardería Laguna Amarga. Wings are interconnected by spacious living rooms with grand fireplaces. One end of the hotel has an interesting and educational interpretive center about the park. The restaurant (buffet CH\$15,000) serves elaborate dishes of salmon, crab and steak. The spa has a sauna and Jacuzzi, and offers massages and revitalizing treatments.

**Explora** (☎ 02-206-6060 in Santiago; www.explora.com; d per person 4 nights CH\$1,195,000; 📶 📶) Strutting with style, Torres del Paine's most sophisticated (and expensive) digs sit perched above the Salto Chico waterfall at the outlet of Lago Pehoe. Rates include airport transfers, full gourmet meals and a wide variety of excursions led by young, affable, bilingual guides.

Views of the entire Paine massif pour forth from every inch of the hotel. But is it worth shelling out? Before you decide, check out the spa with heated lap pool, sauna, massage rooms and open-air Jacuzzi.

## Getting There & Away

For details of transportation to the park, see p511. Going to El Calafate from the park on the same day requires joining a tour or careful advance planning, since there is no direct service. Your best bet is to return to Puerto Natales.

## Getting Around

Buses drop off and pick up passengers at Laguna Amarga, at the Hielos Patagónicos catamaran launch at Pudeto, and at park headquarters.

The catamaran leaves Pudeto for Mountain Lodge Paine Grande (one way/roundtrip per person CH\$11,000/17,000) at 9:30am, noon and 6pm December to mid-March, at noon and 6pm in late March and November, and at noon only in September, October and April. Another launch travels Lago Grey between Hostería Lago Grey and Refugio Lago Grey (roundtrip CH\$70,000, 1½ to two hours) a couple of times daily; contact the *hostería* for the current schedule.

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