

CHILE, PATAGONIA EL PATAGON AND ENDURANCE RIDE ITINERARY

Day 1, Sunday 27 April

Arrive at Punta Arenas airport and transfer by bus to Puerto Natales. Book into hotel where your guide will meet you to discuss details and answer any questions about your forthcoming adventure.

Day 2, Monday 28 April

Your guide will meet you after breakfast and we drive northward towards Estancia Dos Maria's to meet our horses. Dos Maria's is a working estancia which borders the Torres del Paine National Park and together with the park, shares the immense and breathtaking Lake Toro. As we arrive you will be greeted warmly by the ranch owners and the gaucho who will guide you into wild and secluded areas on horseback for the remainder of the trip. First, we go on a tour of the estancia and watch some aspects of estancia life (sheep shearing, or a round-up). Next, we go for a ride around the estancia with trots and canters through sheep and horse pastures. We ride down to the banks of Lake Toro to have lunch, before returning across open land to the ranch house and then make the short drive to a gorgeous tree lined estancia converted into a hotel, where we enjoy a delicious meal before a good nights rest.

Time in the saddle: 4 hours

Day 3, Tuesday 29 April

We return Dos Maria's after breakfast, mount our horses and head towards Cerro Castillo, a border crossing and the only outpost in the area, to arrive at the Chinas River. We follow the river as it curves through a long valley spotted with the occasional estancia. Here we may enjoy some good trots and gallops along the riverside. From the valley floor we have excellent views of geographical formations, as tall mountains rise abruptly from the flat pampas. After lunch we cross the river and head towards our evening's accommodation at the banks of Laguna Verde (green Lagoon). Lake Sarmiento unfolds before us, and you will notice its clear turquoise waters are surrounded by a bank of hard white calcium carbonate that extends to form small beaches. Puma scat and prints have been seen in this area and we may even catch a glimpse of the elusive animal. In the distance you will see the unmistakable Torres (Towers) of granite reaching high into the sky, surrounded by snow-capped peaks. Estancia Laguna Verde with its charming architecture and red roofs sits just on the outskirts of the Torres del Paine National Park, and is blessed with a most spectacular view of the massive, glacier studded mountain range. Once the horses are unsaddled, we will head towards the guest house for a refreshing shower, a drink and dinner.

Time in the saddle: 5 hours

Day 4, Wednesday 30 April

Today is a delightful ride around the area, returning to Estancia Laguna Verde in the evening. Glacial lakes, rolling hills and mountain streams are all part of the day's ride. Lunch is taken at a high lookout point.

Time in the saddle: 5 hours

Day 5, Thursday 1 May

After breakfast we begin by crossing once again through the lush forest that surrounds the estancia before we come to a small puesto (workers home) on the banks of beautiful Lake Sarmineto.

Later, we will enjoy several fast trots and gallops as we cross the flat pampas, feeling the freedom and joy of horseback riding across country. Finally we will come to the crest of a small hill above the beautiful Laguna Amarga (bitter Lagoon). This lagoon is especially striking as it is the only saltwater lake in the area, causing salt to build up on the black sand beaches and giving the impression of eternal winter. It is also frequented by flocks of flamingo that group together like pink satin on the surface of the water. We can enjoy a last gallop along the beaches of Laguna Amarga. We will then travel a short distance to Estancia Laguna Amarga where our transfer will be waiting to carry us to our hotel. This evening will be spent in the luxurious comfort of Hosteria Las Torres. Treat yourself to one of the hotels specialty spa treatments, sip your favorite drink or take a stroll around the estancia's expansive grounds.

Time in the saddle: 5 hours

Day 6, Friday 2 May

Today we rest the horses in preparation for the Endurance Ride and take a tour by private van through the Torres del Paine national park. Relax and listen to your guide relate the natural history of the area as you gaze at the enormous snow-capped peaks and glacier fields that stretch out to the horizon. After a visit to the Administration Centre in the heart of the park, we will continue to our lunch spot on the banks of Grey Lake. On a clear day you can see across the milky water to the face of the massive glacier, or for an up close view you will have the option of taking a boat ride out onto the lake. Perfect the moment with an iceberg chilled pisco sour or whisky served by the guide. We end our day in an hotel near the beginning of tomorrow's ride, where we can celebrate our adventure together over a traditional meal and toast with world-class Chilean wines.

Day 7, Saturday 3 May *Endurance Ride*

'Enduro Patagonia' is an annual event in which riders of all age and levels are encouraged to participate. Truly unique in its class, it is a rare opportunity to be one of the competitors while enjoying the breathtaking scenery of the famous Torres del Paine National Park.

The ride briefing is at 0800. You will be riding amongst gauchos and landowners who make this event a yearly tradition. The excitement in the air is tangible as the participants line up to the starting line and begin the ride. The ride in 2008 begins at the eastern edge of the Torres del Paine national park and heads towards Laguna Azul and Valle de la Chinas and the Sierra Contreras looping back around Laguna Amarga. This route is subject to change depending on the conditions in the national park in the weeks preceding the event. You and your horse will test your partnership as you cross rivers, ascend and descend hills and canter over long pampas and through forests and just about every other cross country terrain imaginable.

At the completion of the course, each horse will need to pass a vet check. An awards ceremony and celebration is held in the evening, before enjoying a final dinner together. Return to hotel in Puerto Natales.

Race length 45km or 20km