

Destination South America



Machu Picchu (p884) overlooking the Río Urubamba valley, Peru

Real travelers love South America. It's as if the continent was built for travel; it's the sort of place that presents you with challenges every step of the way and rewards you with euphorias you've never imagined. Sweat yourself dizzy during an Amazon canoe ride and be rewarded with a cool evening of caiman-watching on a black-water lagoon. Brave a white-knuckle bus ride and be astounded by endless Andean vistas. Face the chaos of a massive metropolis like Buenos Aires or Salvador and feel the elation of comprehension when the city suddenly makes sense. Endure Patagonia's wind-driven rain and finally stumble out of your tent beneath an astonishing sunset. The real reward, however, is the South American spirit. It seems like the entire continent approaches life like a good road trip: with the windows rolled down and the music up loud. It's a subtle approach to uncertainty that will surely infect you. And as for the music – it's the one thing that never leaves your side. With every adventure there's a soundtrack. Samba spices up the sandy streets of Brazilian beach towns, panpipes liven Andean markets, Argentine *folklórica* (folk music) trickles out of a truck radio in the pampas, and the jolting rhythm of cumbia makes those Andean bus rides even more absurd. In the end, don't think of South America as a place. Rather, it's something you turn yourself onto, that engulfs you and changes you – your state of mind, your outlook on life. As soon as you step foot on South American soil, the transformation begins.



CHRIS BEALL

Marine iguana, Galápagos Islands (p724), Ecuador

HIGHLIGHTS

BEST ADRENALINE RUSHES

Flying in Pedra Bonita and Iquique ■ hang-glide over Rio from Pedra Bonita (p287) or paraglide over surf and dunes in Iquique, Chile (p459)

Surfing in Peru ■ surf the epic lefts on Peru's northern coast (p899), a paradise of lonely breaks and coastal desert scenery

Climbing in Central Argentina ■ feel the rush of accomplishment when you reach the summit of Cerro Aconcagua (p127), the western hemisphere's highest peak

Skiing and snowboarding in Portillo and Las Leñas ■ carve the powdery slopes of Portillo, Chile (p432) and Las Leñas, Argentina (p129)...in July!

Rafting in Futaleufú, Tena and Cuzco ■ raft Río Futaleufú (p512), Río Misahuallí (p702) and Río Apurímac (p875) – so good we had to name them all

BEST PARKS & NATURAL ATTRACTIONS

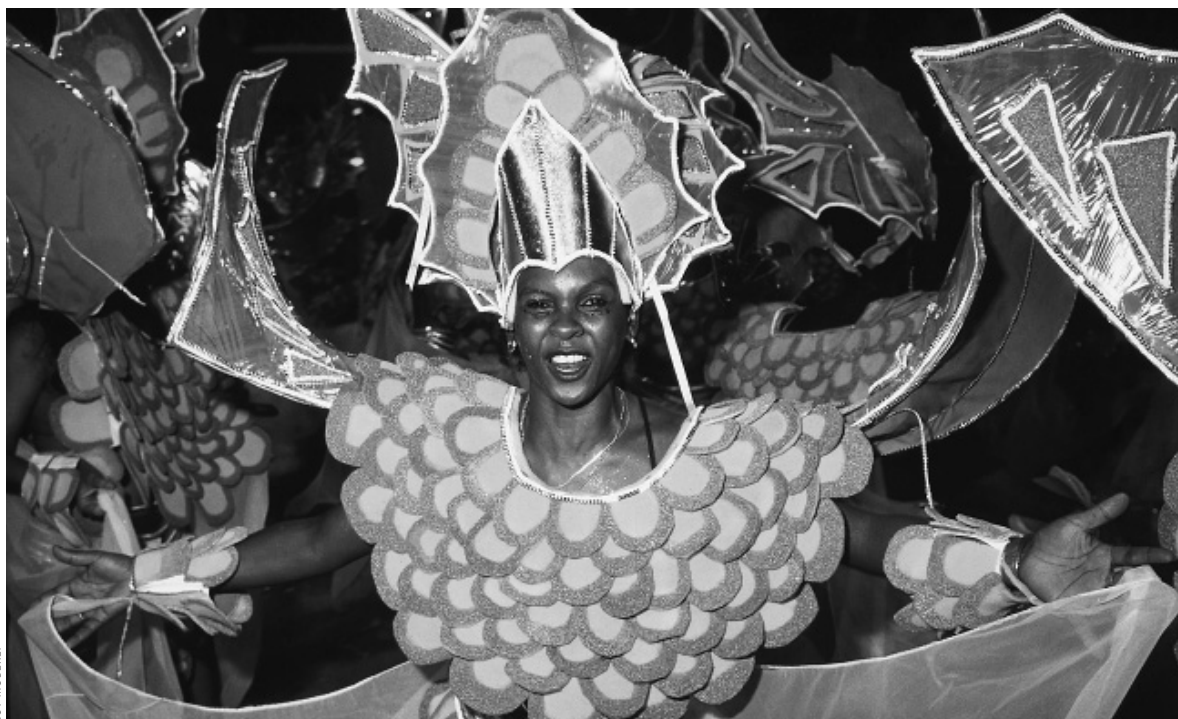
Iguazú Falls ■ boggle your mind beneath the thundering roar of the world's most magnificent waterfalls (Argentina, p90; Brazil, p326)

Parque Nacional Los Glaciares ■ stand awestruck by Argentina's advancing Perito Moreno Glacier (p156) and hike beneath the Fitz Roy Range (p152)

The Pantanal ■ experience the continent's best wildlife-viewing in this vast Brazilian wetland (p332), the largest in the world

Galápagos Islands ■ stare down iguanas and snorkel with penguins on Ecuador's unique archipelago famous for its fearless wildlife (p724)

Parque Nacional Canaima ■ experience two of South America's most breathtaking natural attractions – Salto Ángel (Angel Falls; p1040) and Roraima (p1042) – in Venezuela



GUY MOBERLY

Woman dancing in a Carnival parade (p290), Rio de Janeiro

BEST FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Carnaval ■ go wild at the Bacchanalian frenzy in Brazil (Rio, p290 or Salvador, p341) or experience Bolivia's La Diablada in Oruro (p213)

Diablos Danzantes ■ watch dancing devils shimmy and whirl down the streets of San Francisco de Yare in Venezuela (p999)

Buenos Aires Tango ■ catch Buenos Aires' weeklong tango festival, featuring milongas, shows, and street performances throughout the city (p168)

Bumba Meu Boi ■ bounce with bull puppets through the streets of São Luís, Brazil during this festival of music, dance and theatre (p375)

New Year's Eve in Valparaíso ■ watch fireworks from a fishing boat or join the frolic on the streets of Chile's most beautiful city (p437)

BEST BEACHES

Parque Nacional Tayrona ■ hit the jungle-covered coast and explore some of Colombia's finest beaches within this coastal national park (p580)

Praia do Gunga ■ bliss out on the fine white sand of this little-visited slice of Brazilian paradise (p357)

Archipiélago Los Roques ■ snorkel, camp, hike and otherwise find nirvana on the heavenly white beaches of this Caribbean archipelago (p999)

Ilha Grande ■ sail over to this remote Brazilian island of tropical beaches, Atlantic rainforest and long, quiet walks (p302)

Punta del Diablo ■ leave the crowds, grab your board and venture off to this forgotten fishing village on a stunning beach (p967)



BRENT WINBERNER

Traditional *moai* (massive anthropomorphic statue) carved from soft volcanic rock, Rapa Nui (Easter Island; p530)

BEST CITIES

Buenos Aires ■ wander leafy Palermo Viejo, explore historic San Telmo, down steaks and fine wine and dance all night (p47)

Paramaribo ■ let Suriname's capital suck you into a fascinating world of colonial Dutch architecture and Latin culture (p765)

Rio de Janeiro ■ fall in love with the world's most beautifully set city and the *cariocas* (people from Rio) themselves (p280)

Valparaíso ■ walk the cobblestone streets of Chile's cultural capital, stunningly perched on steep hillsides above the Pacific (p433)

Mérida ■ party the night away after a day of outdoor fun in this totally unpretentious university town in Venezuela (p1011)

BEST HISTORICAL SITES

Machu Picchu ■ mystify your mind at South America's most famous and spectacular archaeological site (p884)

Ciudad Perdida ■ trek through jungle to the 'Lost City' of the Tayronas, one of the America's largest pre-Columbian cities (p581)

Rapa Nui (Easter Island) ■ marvel at the colossal stone *moai* (massive anthropomorphic statues) on this remote Chilean island (p530)

The Nazca Lines ■ fly over these ancient and mysterious line-drawings in Peru, visible only from the sky (p851)

Potosí ■ tour the stunningly hellish cooperative mines that bankrolled Spanish colonialism (p237)

ITINERARIES

THE BIG LOOP

How long?

The Big Loop:

4-8 months;

short version:

6-8 weeks

When to go?

Year-round; consider

Carnaval in Feb/Mar;

if you add Patagonia,

Dec-Mar is best

Budget?

Daily average if you

scrimp: US\$20-25

This is it – the loop of loops, the mother of all treks, the time-is-not-an-issue journey of a lifetime (plus an alternate for folks with less time).

Ease into Latin American culture in **Buenos Aires** (p47). If you want to see Patagonia, travel south to **Bariloche** (p136) and follow the Austral Projection itinerary back to BA. Then head to **Iguazú Falls** (p90). Cross into Brazil and hit **Campo Grande** (p336) for a wildlife tour of the **Pantanal** (p332). Cut west to **Corumbá** (p337) and cross into **Bolivia** (p174). If you don't have time for the entire circuit, explore Bolivia then head into **North-west Argentina** (p92) and continue down the Andes to **Mendoza** (p122). Fly out of BA or **Santiago** (p418), Chile.

For the big loop, continue through Bolivia into **Peru** (p820) via **Lake Titicaca** (p864). Cross into **Ecuador** (p637) and follow the Andean Mountain High itinerary. Continue into Colombia to see the spectacular **Zona Cafetera** (p601). Then go to **Cartagena** (p582) to chill out on the Caribbean. See **Parque Nacional Tayrona** (p580) and **Ciudad Perdida** (p581) before bussing from **Santa Marta** (p577), Colombia to **Maracaibo** (p1008), Venezuela. Then head to **Mérida** (p1011), and hang out for awhile before heading to **Salto Ángel** (p1040) and **Roraima** (p1042). Cross into Brazil at **Santa Elena de Uairén** (p1043). Travel to **Manaus** (p388) and boat down the Amazon River to **Belém** (p377). Then hit **Parque Nacional dos Lençóis Maranhenses** (p377), **Jericoacoara** (p371), **Olinda** (p362) and **Salvador** (p339). Finish in style in **Rio de Janeiro** (p280).

From the Argentine pampas to the chilly Andean páramo, from the Caribbean to the Amazon, the Big Loop winds through seven South American countries, giving the unbound wanderer heaps to write home about. To see Patagonia, combine this with the Austral Projection itinerary.



ANDEAN MOUNTAIN HIGH

For rugged adventure, unparalleled alpine vistas, rich indigenous cultures, fabulous crafts and some of the best, most colorful markets on the continent, journey down the Andes from Ecuador to Argentina.

Fly into **Quito** (p647), shack up in the recently restored colonial **Old Town** (p652), and put a few Spanish lessons under your belt before heading south through the volcano-studded Andes. Do the **Quilotoa Loop** (p679), hit the hot baths in **Baños** (p680) and visit colonial **Cuenca** (p688). Cross into Peru and pause at **Huaraz** (p913) for Peru's best trekking and climbing. Peru's big must is **Machu Picchu** (p884), but skip the overrun Inca Trail and try an alternative **trek** (p888). From there head south across shimmering **Lake Titicaca** (p864) into Bolivia for more hiking, trekking and mountaineering in the **Cordillera Real & Yungas** (p201). Then head south to the hallucinogenic landscapes around **Salar de Uyuni** (p219) before continuing to Argentina by way of **La Quiaca** (p112) and the spectacular **Quebrada de Humahuaca** (p110). Travel through the majestic Argentine Andes until you hit **Mendoza** (p122), near massive **Cerro Aconcagua** (p127), the western hemisphere's highest peak.

Mix this itinerary up by starting in **Cuzco** (p870), Peru, a fabulous place to study Spanish (many prefer it to Quito). Or, to make the entire journey longer, start in **Caracas** (p983) and travel south through **Colombia** (p542), one of the continent's hottest new destinations.

Opportunities for detours abound: the most obvious is a flight from Ecuador to the **Galápagos Islands** (p724). To depart the trodden trail, wander off to some of the world's most remote natural areas, including **Parque Nacional Manu** (p929) in Peru, or **Parque Nacional Madidi** (p253) and **Parque Nacional Noel Kempff Mercado** (p248) in Bolivia.



How long?

Partial route: 1 month;
full route: 2 months

When to go?

Year-round

Budget?

Per day US\$10-25 day
(Galápagos trip extra)

Not including side trips, the Andean Mountain High route winds through the more than 4000km of rugged Andean highlands, passing snowcapped volcanoes, windswept páramo, indigenous villages, incredible vistas and some of the western hemisphere's highest peaks. Primary transport? The bus, a South American highlight in itself!

AUSTRAL PROJECTION

Mysterious, windswept, glacier-riddled Patagonia is one of South America's most magical destinations. For tent-toters, outdoor nuts, climbers, and hikers, it's a dream. Patagonia – and the archipelago of Tierra del Fuego – is best visited November through March, and you can see more for cheaper if you camp. Remember, the going can be *slo-o-o-w*.

Start in busy **Bariloche, Argentina** (p136), in the Argentine Lake District. The Andes here are magnificently forested and studded with azure lakes. Don't miss **Parque Nacional Nahuel Huapi** (p139) or **Parque Nacional Lanín** (p133). Head to **Puerto Montt** (p501), Chile, and down to the serene archipelago of **Chiloé** (p505). After exploring the islands (and eating the seafood!), take the ferry to **Chaitén** (p510) and travel east to the Andean hamlet of **Futaleufú** (p512) for some of the continent's best rafting. Cross into Argentina, stop in **Esquel** (p142), and bounce down the desolate RN 40 to **El Chaltén** (p152), in spectacular **Parque Nacional Los Glaciares** (p156). Hike and climb your brains out before having them warped by the **Perito Moreno Glacier** (p156) near **El Calafate** (p153). Hike beneath the famous granite spires of Chile's **Torres del Paine** (p524) and rest up in **Puerto Natales** (p521). Head to **Punta Arenas** (p518) before traveling south into **Tierra del Fuego** (p158) and bottoming out at **Ushuaia, Argentina** (p159). After severe southern exposure, work north along the Atlantic, stopping for penguins in **Reserva Provincial Punta Tombo** (p150) and whales in **Reserva Faunística Península Valdés** (p148). By this point you'll be achin' for civilization, so beeline to **Buenos Aires** (p47).

An alternate, though pricey, route south is aboard Chile's world-famous **Navimag ferry** (p418), which sails through majestic fjords to Puerto Natales.

By the end of this epic adventure, you'll have traveled over 5000km and seen the very best of Patagonia. Bus and hitching are the cheapest modes of travel, but lake crossings are possible and flights make things faster. Argentina's RN 40 is covered by private minivan.



AMAZON & ON & ON...

Few rivers fire the imagination like the Amazon. Ever dreamt of going down it? You can. But there's a reason everything west of **Manaus** (p388), Brazil is off the beaten track: boat travel on the Amazon can be bleak, boring, sightless, uncomfortable, hot and dirty. Truthfully, it's *hardcore*.

Just to make the journey as long as possible, set off from **Yurimaguas, Peru** (p931). Start with a 10-hour warm-up float to Lagunas and check out the **Reserva Nacional Pacaya-Samiria** (p932) before heading on to **Iquitos** (p932), on the Río Marañón (which becomes the Amazon). From Iquitos (inaccessible by road), get a three-day boat to the tri-border region of Peru, Colombia and Brazil, and take a break – and a jungle excursion – in **Leticia, Colombia** (p620). From Leticia, it's three more arduous days to Manaus, but breaking the trip at the amazing **Reserva de Desenvolvimento Sustentável Mamirauá** (p393) makes it all worthwhile. Once you do hit Manaus, you're getting into well-traveled territory. But, having come this far, the journey is only over when you hit majestic **Belém** (p377), 3½ days away on the Atlantic. Break the journey in **Santarém** (p386) to visit beautiful **Alter do Chão** (p387).

For those who really want a challenge, an interesting alternative would be starting this journey in the Ecuadorian oil town of **Coca** (p699) on the Río Napo. From here it's a 12- to 15-hour journey to **Nuevo Rocafuerte** (p701) on the Peruvian border. You can spend the night (or a few weeks if you don't time the cargo-boat departure right) before undertaking the six-day boat ride to Iquitos, Peru. In Iquitos, pick up the first part of the itinerary.



How long?

Two weeks if you time it right and never stop (nuts). One month with breaks.

When to go?

Year-round

Budget?

Per day US\$25-40

By the time you finish this maniacal journey, you'll have motored over 4000km, slapped hundreds of mosquitoes, eaten loads of lousy food, met some true characters and seen a lot of water. Most importantly, you'll have floated the Amazon from its Peruvian headwaters to the Atlantic.

GOING GUIANAS

They're expensive, they're hard to reach, they're largely unpopulated, and they can be very, very captivating. And they're *definitely* off the beaten path. Where you start depends on where you're coming from: Guyana via New York, Cayenne via Paris (it's a French domestic flight!) or Paramaribo via Amsterdam. For the sake of a route, let's say you're traveling overland from Brazil.

From **Oiapoque, Brazil** (p385), hire a dugout canoe (unless the bridge is complete) across the Oyapok River into **French Guiana** (p744). You're now officially off the beaten track. Make your way by bus across the verdant, forgotten landscape (complete with burned-out cars along the roadside) to **Cacao** (p753). From here, embark upon the two-day hike along **Sentier Molokoï de Cacao** (p753) for some wildlife-spotting fun. Then make your way up to **Kourou** (p754) and take a ferry (or a more comfy catamaran) across shark-infested waters to the **Îles du Salut** (p755), a former island prison where you can sling up a hammock in the old prison dormitories! Back on the mainland, head up the coast and watch the turtles nesting at **Awala-Yalimopo** (April to July only; p758) before crossing into **Suriname** (p762). Hang out for a few days in weirdly wonderful **Paramaribo** (p765), and set up a tour into the majestic **Central Suriname Nature Reserve** (p770). From Paramaribo, continue west to **Nieuw Nickerie** (p770), where you cross into **Guyana** (p774). Head up to **Georgetown** (p778), and make a detour by boat up to isolated **Shell Beach** (p783) or to see the spectacular **Kaieteur Falls** (p783). Back in Georgetown, get a bus south across the majestic Rupununi Savannahs, stopping in **Annai** and **Lethem** (p784) to savor the vast isolation.

Exploring the Guianas means leaving the beaten path behind and journeying some 2500km, as the crow flies. You'll see tropical jungle, fascinating capital cities, real cowboy country and a couple of the continent's most pristine beaches.



SURREAL SOUTH AMERICA

Travel becomes magical when the real turns surreal, which happens a lot in South America. Some places are especially strange and well worth a detour. In Venezuela, journey to Lago Maracaibo and witness the **Cata-tumbo lightning** (p1010). Rest your travelin' bones in **Vilcabamba, Ecuador** (p697), where people live to be over 100, mountains resemble faces, and local cacti do funny things to people's brains. In Peru, fly over the **Nazca Lines** (p851) and catch the kaleidoscopic sunrises near **Tres Cruces** (p891). Journey to Bolivia and marvel at the surreal landscapes of **Salar de Uyuni** (p219). In Argentina, the **Difunta Correa shrine** (p128) is one of the strangest sights you'll ever see.

For a truly bizarre experience, sling up a hammock inside the abandoned island prison on **Îles du Salut** (p755). Ghost towns are marvelous places to bend the brain, so stop in **Humberstone** (p462), Chile, a spookily abandoned town. The only thing approaching the surreal, moonlike quality of Argentina's **Parque Provincial Ischigualasto** (p128) are the sand dunes and crystalline pools of Brazil's dreamlike **Parque Nacional dos Lençóis Maranhenses** (p377). When you've seen it all, spend a luxurious night in São Paulo's **Hotel Unique** (p308), for architectural unreality at its best.



NOCTURNAL WILDLIFE TOUR

Sometimes you just need to let loose. And, hey, since partying is often the best way to meet the locals, just consider it...blending in.

A university vibe and all-night music scene make **Mérida** (p1011) the best place to tear up Venezuela. The Guyanese will tell you that Georgetown's **Sheriff Street** (p782) is the hottest party on the Caribbean. Of course, a night out in beautiful **Cartagena** (p582), Colombia, might convince you otherwise. But, for the real thing, head to **Cali** (p604). For small-town beach scene, hit **Montañita** (p716), Ecuador. In Peru, spend a night crawling Lima's **Barranco neighborhood** (p842). Later, treat new friends to drinks in the sand-dune oasis of **Huacachina** (p850).

Whatever you do, don't miss a night in **Buenos Aires** (p47), which starts after midnight with mandatory bar-hopping in Palermo Viejo. Time things right and you'll catch the summerlong party at swanky **Punta del Este, Uruguay** (p964). Of course, you can't say you've partied in South America until you do Brazil: hit **Salvador** (p339) for the music, and then the epicenter of saturnalia itself, **Ipanema** (p285), in Rio de Janeiro. Come down slowly in **Arraial d'Ajuda** (p354) or **Jericoacoara** (p371) on Brazil's northern coast.



Getting Started

Psyching yourself up for the trip (some call it planning) is half the fun. This section is intended to help you decide when to go and predict what kind of cash you'll drop, plus offer a glimpse into what you might experience while bouncing around South America. Also browse the South America Directory (p1057), which covers subjects ranging from activities to volunteering.

See under Climate in the Directory section of each country chapter for country-specific information.

WHEN TO GO

South America spans from the tropics – where sweltering lowlands can lie only hours from chilly Andean highlands – nearly to Antarctica, so when to go depends on where you go.

Climbing and trekking in the Andes of Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia is best in the drier months from May to September but possible year-round. Travel in the Amazon is also possible year-round, though regional rainy seasons throughout the Amazon make river travel easier. Ski season in Argentina and Chile is June to September. Patagonia is best visited during the region's summer months of December to April, but hotels and campgrounds book solid and prices are highest during the peak months of January and February.

The continent's wild array of colorful festivals (see p1066) is also a consideration; Carnaval, the most famous celebration of all, is in late February/early March.

South Americans love to travel during the two- to three-week period around Semana Santa (Holy Week/Easter) and during the Christmas–New Year holidays. Both foreign and national tourists are out in droves in July and August. During these tourist high seasons prices peak, hotels fill up and public transportation gets slammed. The flip side is a celebratory, holiday atmosphere that can be wonderfully contagious.

COSTS & MONEY

Brazil, Chile, Venezuela, Uruguay and the Guianas are the most expensive countries, while the cheapest are Bolivia, Ecuador, Colombia and – as travelers worldwide now know – Argentina.

Generally, it will cost less per person if you travel in twos or threes, spend little time in big cities and travel slowly. Costs rack up as you tag on comforts like air-conditioning and a private bathroom, expensive tours to places such as the Galápagos Islands, or activities like skiing or clubbing.

WHAT TO TAKE?

Remember this: you can buy just about anything you'll need in South America. Certain items, however, can be hard to find. For more on what to bring, flip through the South America Directory (p1057). And don't forget the following:

- alarm clock
- big map of South America
- duct tape
- earplugs
- first-aid kit
- flashlight or head lamp
- insect repellent
- photocopies of important documents
- pocket USB-type flash drive for digital storage
- Swiss Army knife or multitool (with corkscrew)
- universal sink plug

WHAT YOU'LL PAY

To give a very rough idea of relative costs, let's assume you're traveling with another person, mostly by bus, staying in cheap but clean hotels, eating in local restaurants and food stalls, with the occasional splurge on sightseeing or a night out dancing. Not including juicy side trips and/or tours into interior regions, you could expect the following as a minimum per person/per day budget:

- | | |
|--|------------------------------------|
| ■ Argentina – US\$20 to US\$25 | ■ French Guiana – US\$50 to US\$60 |
| ■ Bolivia – US\$15 to US\$25 | ■ Guyana – US\$25 to US\$30 |
| ■ Brazil – US\$35 to US\$45 | ■ Paraguay – US\$20 to US\$30 |
| ■ Chile – US\$35 to US\$40 | ■ Peru – US\$15 to US\$25 |
| ■ Colombia – US\$15 to US\$25 | ■ Suriname – US\$25 to US\$30 |
| ■ Ecuador – US\$15 to US\$20
(substantially more with a Galápagos trip) | ■ Uruguay – US\$25 to US\$35 |
| | ■ Venezuela – US\$20 to US\$50 |

Traveler's checks (best if in US dollars) are the safest way to carry money, but hardly the most convenient. They usually entail waiting in lines during standard bank hours, which makes an ATM card much more appealing. ATMs are available in most cities and large towns. Many ATMs accept personal identification numbers (PINs) of only four digits; find out whether this applies to your destinations before heading off.

Also see Money in the country chapter directories and in the South America Directory at the back of this book (p1057).

LIFE ON THE ROAD

Whether you're thumbing a ride in Chilean Patagonia, waiting curbside for a milk truck in the Ecuadorian Andes or listening to the airbrakes hiss on a hair-raising ride through the Bolivian *altiplano*, South America kicks out unforgettable experiences on the road. In fact, some argue the road *is* the experience.

And then there's *life* on the road. In South America, it's never short on challenge. But that's what makes it South America. Travel here is about

TEN TIPS TO STAY ON A BUDGET

There's no need to bargain locals out of every last peso when other tried-and-true techniques will actually save you more. Try the following:

- Camp whenever you can, especially in Patagonia and in hostel backyards.
- Wash your clothes in hotel sinks.
- Form a group for tours; your bargaining power increases the more people you have.
- Skip the taxi during daylight hours and walk or take local buses.
- Instead of eating at restaurants, buy food at open-air markets and eat outdoors.
- Always ask about the *almuerzo* or *menú* (set lunch).
- Take overnight buses in countries such as Argentina and Brazil to save a night's hotel costs.
- Take 2nd-class buses.
- Travel slowly.
- Visit museums on free days.

struggling awake for a dawn departure after being kept up all night by a blaring soccer game. It's about sucking dust on a long bus ride while manically trying to guess which of the towns you keep passing through is the one you intended to visit. It means peaceful relief when you finally arrive and find your pack still on the roof. It's the sight of begging children, the arduous haul to the hotel, a screaming bladder and the excitement of a new town all catapulting your mind from one emotional extreme to another.

The hotel manager says the showers are hot, but the water hitting the skin is as cold as a Patagonian glacier. There's no seat on the toilet. (At least the bowels are behaving.) You call that a fan? It sounds like a helicopter! OK – food. Leave the pack in the corner, get out the map, locate the market, grab the passport (or leave it behind?) and go. The sun feels great. Then you get lost, your mood turns sour as your blood sugar crashes, you find the market, you smell the mangos, and you try to haggle but have no clue what the fruit seller is saying. You finally hand over the cash – did you just get ripped off? – and walk out to find a good place to eat. And when you do, it's sheer and incomparable bliss.

CONDUCT

Introductions

In general, South Americans are gregarious, not easily offended, and will want to exchange pleasantries before starting a conversation; skipping this part of any social interaction is considered unrefined and tactless. Public behavior can be very formal, especially among government officials, who expect respect and deference. Casual introductions, on the other hand, are relaxed and friendly. In countries like Argentina, Chile and French Guiana men and women kiss other women on the cheek, rather than shaking hands. Men usually shake hands with other men, unless they're real pals, in which case they kiss each other on the cheek. In countries like Ecuador and Guyana the handshake is the norm in business and casual introductions alike. If in doubt, wait to see what the other person does and then respond.

Indigenous People

The word *indígenas* refers to indigenous men and women, who are especially present in the Andes and in the Amazon Basin. You may hear the term *indio/a* batted around among *mestizos* (people of mixed indigenous and European descent) but it is considered very derogatory.

Access to many remote Amazon Basin areas where people retain the most traditional ways of living is heavily restricted, and it is essential to respect these restrictions. Such regulations help to deflect unwanted interference and protect the communities from diseases to which they have little immunity.

Other indigenous groups or subgroups have opened their doors to travelers who want to learn about their culture. Community tourism is one

DOS & DON'TS

- Do tip 10% if *servicio* (service) isn't included in the bill.
- Do be respectful when haggling for anything.
- Do approach eating with an adventurous attitude.
- Don't take pictures of people without permission.
- Don't feel uncomfortable when people stare in the Andean countries.
- Don't hesitate to deny food from strangers.

of the highlights of South America, but remember to take ceremonies and rituals seriously, despite the fact that they may be organized for your sake. Ayahuasca and other psychoactive drugs play an important part of religious life for some rainforest communities; it is illegal for foreigners to take these drugs, although you may be offered a trip down shaman lane by certain opportunists. Do your research.

Dress

Casual dress has become more acceptable recently, but most South Americans still take considerable pride in their personal appearance, especially in the evening. Foreign visitors should, at the very least, be clean and neatly dressed if they wish to conform to local standards and be treated with respect by officials, businesspeople and professionals. When going out at night, you'll stand out in typical travelers' attire in all but the most gringo-haunted hangouts.

To people of modest means, even shoestring travelers possess considerable wealth. Flaunting items such as expensive cameras, watches and jewelry is likely to attract thieves. Police and military officials are often poorly paid and may resent affluent visitors who do not behave appropriately. (Read: bribery attempts could be coming your way.)

TOP TENS

Our Favorite Albums

- *África Brasil* by Jorge Ben (Brazil, 1976)
- *Arepa 3000: A Venezuelan Journey into Space* by Los Amigos Invisibles (Venezuela, 2000)
- *La Argentinidad al Palo 1 & 2* by Bersuit Vergarabat (Argentina, 2004)
- *The Nada* by Kevin Johansen + the Nada (Argentina/USA, 2001)
- *Jolgorio* by Peru Negro (Peru, 2004)
- *Os Mutantes* by Os Mutantes (Brazil, 1968)
- *Salsa Explosiva!* by Fruko y sus Tesos (Colombia, US release, 2004)
- *Samba Esporte Fino* by Seu Jorge (Brazil, 1999)
- *Tribalistas* by Tribalistas (Brazil, 2003)
- *Tropicalia: Ou Panis Et Circenses* by Various Artists (Brazil, 1967)

Must-Read Books

- *Dona Flor and her Two Husbands* by Jorge Amado (Brazil, 1978)
- *Ficciones* by Jorge Luis Borges (Argentina, 1944)
- *Hopscotch* by Julio Cortázar (Argentina, 1963)
- *House of Spirits* by Isabel Allende (Chile, 1982)
- *In Patagonia* by Bruce Chatwin (England, 1977)
- *Marching Powder* by Rusty Young (Australia, 2002)
- *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel García Márquez (Colombia, 1967)
- *Open Veins of Latin America* by Eduardo Galeano (Uruguay, 1971)
- *Papillón* by Henri Charrière (France & French Guiana, 1970)
- *The Story Teller* by Mario Vargas Llosa (Peru, 1987)

Sex

Sexual contact between locals and visitors, male and female, straight and gay, is quite common, and some areas could be described as sex-tourism destinations. Prostitution exists, but is most common in Brazil, where the distinction between prostitution and promiscuity can be hazy. Child prostitution is not common but, sadly, exists. There are harsh penalties for those convicted of soliciting children and real risks of entrapment. AIDS is widespread among gay and straight people alike, so always protect yourself.

Taking Photographs

Don't photograph individuals without obtaining their permission first, especially indigenous people. If someone is giving a public performance, such as a street musician or a dancer at Carnival, or is incidental to a photograph, in a broad cityscape for example, it's usually not necessary to request permission – but if in doubt, ask or refrain. Also see p1070.

Snapshots

CURRENT EVENTS

You'd have to be holed up in an underground bunker in the Paraguayan Chaco to miss the trend sweeping South America today: the continent is leaning to the left – big time. In voting booths across the continent, South Americans have firmly expressed their frustration with government corruption and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank and US policies that have fed it. The message: we're doing things *our* way.

When you line up the list of South American leaders today, it's no wonder the White House and international lenders are worried. The zealously anti-US and self-proclaimed socialist-revolutionary Hugo Chávez heads Venezuela and considers Fidel Castro one of his closest allies. Left-winger and former shoeshine boy Luiz Inacio 'Lula' da Silva leads Brazil. In 2005 Uruguayans elected Tabare Vazquez, who immediately restored ties with Cuba, signed an energy plan with Venezuela, and announced sweeping welfare packages for poor Uruguayans. In December 2005 Bolivians elected Evo Morales, the nation's first indigenous president and a former coca farmer who deemed himself 'Washington's nightmare.' In 2006 Morales boldly nationalized the country's natural-gas supplies and moved forward with plans for land reform.

Chilean voters, in 2006, chose South America's second democratically elected female president, Michelle Bachelet. The 54-year-old pediatrician is agnostic, a socialist, a long-time human rights activist and a single mother of three – hardly minor issues in a predominantly Catholic country that legalized divorce only two years prior to her election. Even Argentina's center-left president, Nestor Kirchner, took a serious stand against the powers that be: in 2005, he paid off Argentina's entire debt to the IMF to avoid the institution's free-market policy demands.

But it's not *all* politics *all* the time. The hot news on travelers' tongues is Colombia – not that the international coffee icon Juan Valdez hung up his actor's hat in 2006 (which he did), but that the country has become increasingly safe for travelers. Colombia saw a 21% increase in foreign visitors between 2004 and 2005. In other news, the country became one of the handful of South American nations to take steps – small steps, but steps nonetheless – toward legalizing abortion. It's somewhat surprising, considering the 2006 re-election of Alvaro Uribe solidified Colombia as one of the last bastions of conservatism on the continent.

Argentina still holds the title of hippest hot spot, and travel there remains cheap, despite the fact that the economy continues on its upswing – good news for travelers and locals alike. In 2006 a German explorer convinced the Peruvian government to map, measure and announce to the world the presence of the planet's third-highest waterfalls, Gocta Falls in the Amazon Basin. Local inhabitants (who feared the curse of a mermaid should they disclose the falls' location) had kept the waterfalls secret until 2002. In May, 2006 a wave of violence struck Sao Paulo, Brazil, when protesting prison gangs orchestrated the killing of 41 police officers. Police responded by killing 107 people in what human-rights organizations have deemed a throwback to Brazil's dictatorial days.

All news, however, seemed to pale in comparison to South America's most beloved event – the World Cup. Unfortunately, no South American team made it to the final, despite the initial show of strength by hopefuls Brazil and, especially, Argentina. Both teams were knocked out during the

Visit Global Exchange (www.globalexchange.org) to read why South American countries blocked the US-backed Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA; ALCA in Spanish) at the 2005 Americas Summit in Mar del Plata.

When Evo Morales became Bolivia's first indigenous president, he kept his casual style of dress and his signature striped wool sweaters. Soon, stores everywhere were selling striped sweaters and one Bolivian designer even launched a new line, called 'Evo Fashion.'

In October 2005, Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez urged families to shun Halloween, calling it a 'game of terror' and part of the US culture of creating fear.

At its peak, the Inca empire governed at least 12 million people from 100 separate cultures and 20 language groups. Its highways traversed more than 8000km of the Andes.

quarter-finals, by France and Germany, respectively. The big surprise was the Ecuadorian team, which, in only its second World Cup appearance, reached round 16 before losing to England. Just wait until next time.

HISTORY

The First South Americans

Back in the salad days (sometime between 12,500 and 70,000 years ago), humans migrated from Asia to Alaska over a land bridge across the Bering Strait and slowly hunted and gathered their way south. Settled agriculture developed in South America between 5000 BC and 2500 BC in and around present-day Peru, and the emerging societies ultimately developed into major civilizations, of which the Inca empire was the most sophisticated.

Enter the Spanish

At the time of the Spanish invasion in the early 16th century, the Inca empire had reached the zenith of its power, ruling over millions of people from northern Ecuador to central Chile and northern Argentina, where native peoples of the Araucanian language groups fiercely resisted incursions from the north.

The Spanish first arrived in Latin America in 1492, when Christopher Columbus, who was bankrolled by Queen Isabella of Spain to find a new route to Asia's spice islands, accidentally bumped into the Caribbean islands. Meanwhile, the Portuguese navigator Vasco da Gama founded the new sea route to Asia. These spectacular discoveries raised the stakes in the brewing rivalry between Spain and Portugal, and to sort out claims of their newly discovered lands, they decided it was treaty time.

Dividing & Conquering

Spanish and Portuguese representatives met in 1494 to draw a nice little line at about 48° west of Greenwich, giving Africa and Asia to Portugal and all of the New World to Spain. Significantly, however, the treaty placed the coast of Brazil (not discovered until six years later) on the Portuguese side of the line, giving Portugal access to the new continent.

Between 1496 and 1526, Spanish exploration from Panama intensified. Rumors surfaced of a golden kingdom south of Panama, prompting Francisco Pizarro to convince Spanish authorities to finance an expedition of 200 men.

When Pizarro encountered the Inca, the empire was wracked by dissension and civil war and proved vulnerable to this invasion by a very small force of Spaniards. Pizarro's well-armed soldiers terrorized the population, but his deadliest weapon was infectious disease, to which indigenous people lacked any immunity. The Inca ruler Huayna Capac died, probably of smallpox, in about 1525.

Lima, founded in 1535 as the capital of the new viceroyalty of Peru, was the base for most of the ensuing exploration and conquest, and became the seat of all power in Spanish South America. By 1572 the Spanish had defeated

TIMELINE



and killed two successive Inca rulers – Manco Inca and Tupac Amaru – and solidified Spain's dominance over much of the continent.

Silver, Slavery & Separation

Following the conquest, the Spaniards, who above all else wanted gold and silver, worked the indigenous populations mercilessly in the mines and the fields. Native American populations declined rapidly, however, due to introduced diseases. In several parts of the continent, African slaves were introduced to make up for the lack of indigenous labor, notably in the plantations of Brazil and the mines of Bolivia.

The movement for independence by the Spanish colonies began around the end of the 18th century, when Spain, devoting its energy and troops to the war against France, began to lose control of the colonies. By the end of the war in 1814, Venezuela and Argentina had effectively declared independence from Spain, and over the next seven years, the other Spanish colonies followed suit. Brazil became autonomous in 1807 and declared independence in 1822.

Independence & Dependence

After independence, conservative rural landowners, known as *caudillos*, filled the power vacuum left by the departed colonial regime. Strong dictatorships, periods of instability and the gross inequality between powerful elites and the disfranchised masses have since characterized most South American countries.

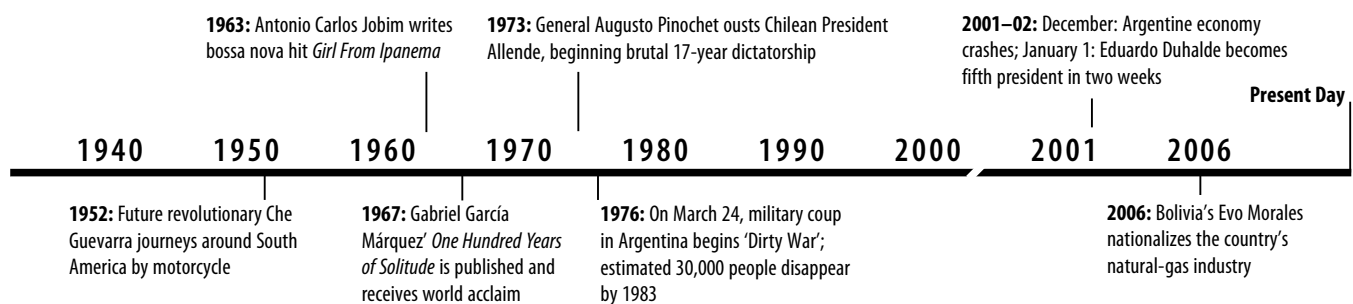
After WWII, which marked the beginning of industrialization throughout South America, most countries turned to foreign loans and investment to make up for their lack of capital. This set the stage for the massive debt crises of the 1970s and 1980s, as South American governments accelerated their borrowing, and profits from industry and agriculture made their way into Western banks and the pockets of corrupt South American officials. Dictatorships provided a semblance of stability, but oppression, poverty and corruption bred violent guerrilla movements in many countries, most notably (and most recently) in Peru and Colombia (see those chapters for details). Many of the problems facing South America today are a direct result of foreign debt and the systems of corruption and inequality that date back to colonial and post-independence years. The recent upsurge of populist and nationalist leaders (see Current Events, p25) is largely a democratic response to unpopular austerity measures forced upon South American countries by the IMF and World Bank.

Published in 1552, Bartolomé de las Casas' impassioned *Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies* is one of the only accounts written during the Spanish conquest that is sympathetic to indigenous Americans.

THE CULTURE

Indigenous Culture

When foreigners imagine indigenous South Americans, odds are they imagine either the colorfully dressed *indígenas* (indigenous people) of the Andean highlands or the people of the Amazon rainforests. The Quechua and other



SOUTH AMERICAN CINEMA *Lara Dunston*

Films first traveled to South America when the French Lumière brothers – the inventors of the first movie camera – sent teams around the world to demonstrate (and sell) their new inventions. In 1896 their first camera and projection crews headed off to Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro (stopping also in Mexico City and Havana). Interestingly, Argentina and Brazil today have the most well-developed film industries and produce the most cinematically sophisticated movies on the continent.

The Lumière teams were soon followed by American Biograph company camera crews hired to shoot exotic footage from the continent. As a result, the first images of South America to be seen by the rest of the world were shot by foreigners – the forerunners to the kind of programs we now watch on the Travel Channel. These films showed the rest of the globe what South American cities looked like – their splendid architecture and bustling streets, their traditional rituals and colorful festivities, the political pomp and ceremony – along with picturesque vistas of ancient ruins, wonderful countryside, lush jungles and forests, and arid landscapes. No doubt they inspired many travelers, adventurers and opportunists to journey to ‘the end of the earth.’

In South America itself, people who lived in towns along railway lines were the first to experience the thrill of watching flicks, until the entrepreneurial mobile moving-picture men (*comicos de la legua*) arrived in town with horse-drawn projection houses to set up temporary cinemas. Now there are movie theaters in most towns, from state-of-the-art multiplexes in slick shopping malls to atmospheric art-house cinemas showing challenging films that are difficult to see outside South America. Make an effort to seek these and you’ll be rewarded.

Like the continent’s overall industrial development, film industries in countries such as Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Peru and Venezuela developed slowly and unevenly. Some countries experienced sporadic flurries of activity during the 20th century, while in small countries such as Ecuador, Paraguay and Uruguay there was very little film production until recently. Although production costs are comparatively low in South America, it still takes a lot of money to finance a movie. As a result, filmmaking has often been artisanal in nature, using only small crews, basic equipment and natural light. On the other hand, the more industrialized countries of Argentina and Brazil have had solid histories of fairly continuous Hollywood-style studio production, with strong local audiences and markets for their films all over the continent and overseas in Spain and Portugal.

Although Hollywood has always saturated the continent’s market with Spanish-language versions of its movies, many distinctly South American genres have emerged. The Brazilian *chanchada* is a comic, carnival-like musical, while Argentina’s *tangueras* are centered on the tango. There are several versions of the Western cowboy genre, including Argentine *gaucho* films, often based on epic novels, and Brazil’s *cangaço*. Melodrama has always been popular throughout South America, providing vehicles for stars like Brazilian Carmen Miranda, and Argentine singer Carlos Gardel, whose appeal spread across the continent and, later, to Hollywood. You’ll see these classic films sold at corner newsstands in most cities and large towns in South America.

South American films have long had a sociopolitical focus, from the genre pics of the 1940s and ‘50s to the more explicitly political films of the 1960s and ‘70s and the innovative dramas of the 1980s and ‘90s. These films highlighted the struggles of the poor, the disadvantaged or the dispossessed, with plots centered, for example, on the rural classes’ oppression of indigenous workers, a servant girl’s rape by her master and subsequent vengeance, a political prisoner’s difficult life behind bars, or an old woman’s search for her orphaned grandchild stolen during the military dictatorship.

See Luis Puenzo’s *La historia oficial* (The Official Story, 1984) about Argentina’s ‘dirty little war’ and victims of that military junta (the *desaparecidos*) and you’ll better understand why the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo marched in front of Buenos Aires’ presidential palace for 25 years. Chilean Gonzalo Justiniano’s *Amnesia* (1994) is about one man’s inability to forget the atrocities committed by soldiers during dictator Augusto Pinochet’s reign of terror.

The films of the 1960s and '70s were the most politically radical and were part of an idealistic continent-wide movement known as the New Latin American Cinema (*el nuevo cine latinoamericano*). Inspired by the gritty postwar Italian neorealism movement, many South American filmmakers went to study film in Rome in the 1950s. They returned to shoot stories that depicted the realities of contemporary South American life with the aim of motivating people to act to change society. Often documentary-like, these films highlighted (rather than disguised) their low budget to create a unique visual style that was raw yet rich, stark and sometimes surreal. Their impoverished aesthetics were rooted in the philosophies of the filmmakers; Argentines Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino sought to develop a 'third (world) cinema,' while Brazilian Glauber Rocha aimed to depict the 'aesthetics of hunger.'

Solanas and Getino are best-known for their innovative collagelike, four-hour-long leftist documentary *La Hora de los Hornos* (The Hour of the Furnaces, 1968). Made and shown in secret, this extraordinarily powerful film was intended to politically incite viewers to rally in support of Perón and against social injustice – and it proved very successful. Twenty years later, Solanas received the Best Director award at Cannes for his mesmerizing feature film *Sur* (South), and in 2005, critical acclaim for his documentary *La Dignidad de los Nadies* (The Dignity of the Nobodies), about Argentina's recent political and economic crises and its impact on everyday life. Rocha's epic 1964 film *Deus e o Diabo na Terra do Sol* (Black God, White Devil), about the struggles of the country's poverty-stricken northeastern population, is considered by many to be Brazil's greatest film, closely followed by his 1968 film *Antonio das Mortes*, about a paid assassin, which also earned him a Best Director award at Cannes.

The 1980s and '90s saw a uniquely South American form of magical realism appear in films from all corners of the continent. The magical realist form in cinema was an extension of a style that had existed in literature since the previous century and was made popular in the writings of authors such as Gabriel García Márquez and Isabelle Allende. Argentine director Eliseo Subiela's film *Hombre Mirando al Sureste* (Man Facing Southeast) was an early example. These decades also saw a return to melodrama, with these 'women's films' now being made by feminist women such as Argentine María Luisa Bemberg. Bemberg didn't begin her career until she was in her 50s and a divorced grandmother. Outside of Argentina, she's best known for *Miss Mary* (1986), a drama about society's repression of women starring Julie Christie as a governess working for a wealthy Argentine family. Her bizarre romantic comedy *De Eso No Se Habla* (I Don't Want To Talk About It, 1994) was considerably lighter in tone and starred Marcello Mastroianni as a suave older bachelor who falls for a dwarfed village girl and leads a happy life until the circus comes to town.

The 21st century has seen a new wave of South American films succeeding at the box office at home and abroad like never before. Brazilian Walter Salles, who first attracted attention with *Central do Brasil* (Central Station, 1998), has been one of South America's most prolific filmmakers, telling simple yet life-changing stories set in splendid environments. Fernando Meirelles won raves for *Cidade de Deus* (City of God, 2002), his brutal but life-filled portrait of a Rio *favela* (shanty town). In Argentina, Lucrecia Martel, director of *La Ciénaga* (The Swamp, 2001) and *La Nina Santa* (The Holy Girl, 2004), both set in Salta, has offered extraordinary insights into the intricate complexities of family relationships.

The one constant in South American cinema is its sense of place. Stunning landscapes have always played a major role, from the escapist rural utopias of the 1940s and '50s to the more realistic portraits of indigenous land struggles of the 1960s and '70s. The land continues to inspire contemporary moviemakers. These striking images of the continent are in themselves deeply political and personal, telling a larger story about South America's exploitation and development, its struggles and survival, and its more recent flourishing, skillfully woven into the fabric of its films.

Best Film Festivals

- Mar Del Plata Film Festival (www.mardelplatafilmfest.com), Mar Del Plata, Argentina, March – a gorgeous seaside location and lots of glamorous stars at one of the most respected festivals on the continent.
- Mostra International Film Festival (www.mostra.org), São Paulo, Brazil, October to November – this excellent festival hosts an enormous number of independent films from Latin America and around the globe at a number of São Paulo cinemas.
- Festival Internacional de Cine (www.festicinecartagena.com), Cartagena, Colombia, March – one of the oldest film festivals in South America with film screenings held around the city, and workshops and seminars at universities making it a great place to meet young filmmakers and students.
- Uruguay International Film Festival (www.cinamateca.org.uy), Montevideo, Uruguay, April – this laidback festival of Latin American cinema will give you the opportunity to mix it with a cool young crowd in charming Montevideo.

Must-See Movies

- *Diarios de Motocicleta* (The Motorcycle Diaries) Dir: Walter Salles, Brazil, 2004 – Che Guevara's life-changing motorcycle road trip across South America in the '50s.
- *Cidade de Deus* (City of God) Dir: Fernando Meirelles, Brazil, 2002 – a rare insight into life in Rio de Janeiro's *favelas* (shanty towns).
- *Central do Brasil* (Central Station) Dir: Walter Salles, Brazil, 1998 – a hard old woman and orphaned boy's sentimental journey to the sertão in search of his family.
- *Historias Minimas* (Minimal Stories) Dir: Carlos Sorín, Argentina, 2002 – a complex portrait of seemingly simple lives, set in stunning Patagonian landscapes.
- *Nueve Reinas* (Nine Queens) Dir: Fabián Bielinsky, Argentina, 2000 – an unpredictable, edge-of-your-seat tour of the Buenos Aires of scam artists and swindlers.
- *La Ciénaga* (The Swamp) Dir: Lucrecia Martel, Argentina, 2001 – a tense, often edge-of-your seat, claustrophobic family drama set one sultry summer in the small town of Salta.
- *Play* Dir: Alicia Scherson, Chile, 2005 – an engaging, puzzling film about two young people who stroll the city streets in search of love, set against the lonely backdrop of contemporary Santiago.
- *En la Puta Vida* (Tricky Life) Dir: Beatriz Flores Silva, Uruguay, 2001 – an extraordinary comedy tracing the rapid life-changing events that leads a young woman from hairdressing in Montevideo to prostitution in Barcelona.
- *La Sombra del Caminante* (The Wandering Shadows) Dir: Ciro Guerra, Colombia, 2004 – this award-winning film tells a moving tale of two very different, but equally troubled, men who meet in downtown Bogota.
- *1809–1810 Mientras Llega el Día* (1809–1810 Before Dawn) Dir: Camilo Luzuriaga, Ecuador, 2004 – a portrait of a tempestuous love affair between an academic and his student in Ecuador on the eve of the 1810 revolution.

Also worth checking out:

- *Orfeu Negro* (Black Orpheus) Dir: Marcel Camus, Brazil, 1959
- *Machuca* Dir: Andrés Wood, Chile, 2004
- *Hombre mirando al sudeste* (Man Facing Southeast) Dir: Eliseo Subiela, Argentina, 1986
- *La historia oficial* (The Official Story) Dir: Luis Puenzo, Argentina, 1985
- *Ratas, ratones, rateros* (Rodents) Dir: Sebastian Coredero, Ecuador, 1999
- *El Perro* (The Dog) Dir: Carlos Sorín, Argentina, 2004

linguistic groups of the Bolivian, Ecuadorian and Peruvian highlands have coexisted with the *mestizo* (people of mixed indigenous and European descent) majority – although not without conflict – for centuries. Their cultures are strong, autonomous and reticent to change and have influenced their country's culture (through music, food, language and so on) to its core. For travelers, experiencing these highland cultures firsthand can be as simple as getting on a bus, shopping in a market or hanging around a village. Many indigenous people are friendly with foreigners; but many are wary of them, as outsiders have brutally oppressed their people for centuries.

The lives of rainforest peoples are usually vastly different from what the tourist brochures floating the world suggest. Except under unique circumstances, travelers generally will not encounter indigenous people of the rainforest traditionally dressed, unless they're doing so specifically for the sake of tourism – not an inherently negative situation, but one to approach with awareness. Most rainforest communities have only recently been hit with the Western world. Many are facing the complete upheaval – if not annihilation – of their cultures and lives, and the culture one encounters as a visitor is one in the throes of dramatic change.

Bolivia, Peru and Ecuador have the highest percentages of indigenous people, most of whom live in the highlands. Other important groups include the Tikuna, Yanomami and Guaraní of Brazil, the Mapuche of northern Patagonia, the Aymara of Bolivia, and the Atacameños and Aymara of Chile's *altiplano* (Andean high plain).

Music

How do you spell 'life' in South America? M-u-s-i-c. Turn it off, and the continent would simply grind to a halt. South America's musical landscape is incredibly varied, and its more popular styles – samba, lambada and bossa nova from Brazil, the Argentine tango, Colombian salsa and Andean *música folklórica* (traditional Andean music) – are known internationally. But there are countless regional styles that will likely be new to foreign ears, including *vallenato* in Colombia, Afro-Peruvian music, *zoropó* in Venezuela, *chamamé* and *cumbia villera* in Argentina and *farró* and *carimbo* in Brazil. For those who happen to have more Western pop sensibilities, there's a rich history of *rock en español* (Spanish-language rock) and Nueva Canción (political folk music) in Argentina and Chile. South American musical influences are equally diverse, with Eastern European polkas, African rhythms and North American jazz and rock all factoring into the equation.

Population & People

Over three-quarters of all South Americans live in cities, while large areas such as the Amazon Basin and Atacama Desert are relatively uninhabited. Population growth and internal migration have led to the emergence of supercities, such as São Paulo (population 11 million; 20 million including greater São Paulo), Buenos Aires (13.5 million counting greater Buenos Aires), Rio de Janeiro (11 to 12 million in the entire metropolitan area), Lima (7.6 million) and Bogotá (7.5 million). These megalopolises concentrate some of the most severe social and environmental problems on the continent.

Infant mortality rates are shockingly high in some countries, most notably Bolivia, Brazil and Peru. South America has a high proportion of people younger than 15 years old (30%), but some of the countries (in particular Bolivia, Brazil, Columbia, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela) have even more youthful populations, with nearly 40% of the people younger than 15. It's likely that populations will continue to burgeon as these individuals reach

Online music links, you request? Visit the Humanities section on the Latin American Network Information Center (Lanic; www.lanic.utexas.edu); the Music page will link you up to just about everything having to do with South American music online.

For news on the Americas' and the world's indigenous struggles, see the News section at Survival International (www.survival-international.org).

childbearing ages, and it's doubtful that local economies will be able to provide employment for so many in such a short period of time.

Although the majority of South Americans are *mestizos*, a large percentage of the Peruvian, Ecuadorian and Bolivian populations are self-identified indigenous. Many Brazilians claim African heritage, and the Guianas are a mosaic of East Indians, Indonesians, Africans, Creoles, Chinese and their descendants. Even in the most racially homogeneous countries (eg Argentina, Chile and Paraguay), Syrians, Chinese, Japanese and other immigrants and their descendants are represented in the population.

Religion

About 90% of South Americans are at least nominally Roman Catholic. Virtually every city, town and village has a central church or cathedral and a calendar loaded with Catholic holidays and celebrations. Spreading the faith was a major objective of colonization.

Among indigenous peoples, allegiance to Catholicism was often a clever veneer adopted to disguise traditional beliefs ostensibly forbidden by the church. Similarly, black slaves in Brazil gave Christian names and forms to their African gods, whose worship was discouraged or forbidden. Syncretic beliefs and practices such as Candomblé in Brazil have proliferated to this day, but they do not exclude Christianity. There is no conflict between attending mass one day and seeking guidance from a *brujo* (witch) the next.

In recent decades, various Protestant sects have made inroads among the traditionally Catholic population. There is also a small number of Jews and Muslims sprinkled throughout the continent.

Sports

Baseball, bullfighting, cockfighting and the rodeo are important in some South American countries, but nothing unites most South Americans like football (in the soccer sense, that is). It's the national passion in every South American country. Brazil won its fifth World Cup final in 2002, snatching the world record for most titles taken. Argentina's Boca Juniors are one of the world's most famous teams. If you want to get anyone blabbing, just bring up former Boca Junior star Diego Maradona's infamous 'Hand of God' goal that knocked England out of the 1986 World Cup. He scored with his hand. The passion can reach extremes: in 1994, after Colombian defender Andreas Escobar scored an own-goal in a World Cup game against the US, he was shot 10 times outside a Medellín nightclub. According to police, the gunman shouted 'Gol!' after each shot. To say the least, football is serious. The annual South American championship is the Copa Libertadores. The Copa América is a continent-wide championship played in odd-number years, and non-South American teams are invited.

Volleyball has become extremely popular throughout South America, especially in Brazil. There, people also play a variation called *futvolei*, in which players use their feet instead of their hands.

Rallies (dirt- and off-road auto races) are big in Chile, Argentina, Bolivia and Brazil. Argentina is famous for polo, Buenos Aires being the best place to see a match.

ENVIRONMENT

The Land

The Cordillera de los Andes, the longest continuous mountain system on earth, forms the western margin of the continent, snaking nearly 8000km from Venezuela to southern Patagonia. Riddled with volcanoes, the Andes are part of the volcanic 'Ring of Fire' running from Asia to Alaska to Tierra

Stay up to date on all South American soccer games and tournaments played throughout the continent and the world at www.latinamericanfootball.com.

del Fuego. East of the Andes, the Amazon Basin – the largest river basin in the world – covers parts of Bolivia, Venezuela, Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, the Guianas and Brazil. In the center of the continent (in parts of Brazil, Bolivia and Paraguay), the vast Pantanal is the largest inland wetland on earth. Yep, this place is *big*.

On the geographical side-stage, other physical features include the Orinoco River Basin, which drains the *llanos* (plains) of Venezuela; the barren Chaco of southern Bolivia, northwestern Paraguay and the northern tip of Argentina; the extensive Paraná–Paraguay river system; the fertile pampas of Argentina and Uruguay; and arid, mystical Patagonia, in the far south.

Wildlife

Plant and animal life are generally unique to their habitats. There are numerous habitats throughout South America, but the following are the most important.

AMAZON BASIN RAINFORESTS

Tropical rainforest is the earth's most complex ecosystem. Check out the Amazon: it contains an estimated 50,000 species of higher plants, one-fifth of the world's total. In some of its two-hectare plots, it's possible to find more than 500 tree species; a comparable plot in a midlatitude forest might have three or four. One study found 3000 species of beetle in five small plots and estimated that each tree species supported more than 400 unique animal species. The rainforest canopy is so dense, however, that little to no sunlight penetrates to the forest floor, and nearly all life is found in the trees.

More than 75 monkey species reside in the Amazon, and they're wonderful to spot. Other Amazonian animals include sloths, anteaters, armadillos, tapirs, caiman, pink and grey dolphins, the Amazon manatee and the western hemisphere's greatest feline, the jaguar. Needless to say, the bird-watching is amazing.

TROPICAL CLOUD FORESTS

In remote valleys at higher elevations, tropical cloud forests retain clouds that engulf the forest in a fine mist, allowing wonderfully delicate forms of plant life to survive. Cloud-forest trees have low, gnarled growth, dense, small-leaved canopy, and moss-covered branches supporting orchids, ferns and a host of other epiphytes (plants that gather moisture and nutrients without ground roots). Such forests are the homes of rare species such as the woolly tapir, the Andean spectacled bear and the puma. Some cloud forest areas host over 400 species of birds.

HIGH-ALTITUDE GRASSLANDS

Even higher than the cloud forest, the *páramo* is the natural sponge of the Andes and is characterized by a harsh climate, high levels of ultraviolet light and wet, peaty soils. It's an enormously specialized habitat unique to tropical America and is found only from the highlands of Costa Rica to the highlands of northern Peru. Flora of the *páramo* is dominated by hard grasses, cushion plants and small herbaceous plants, and features dense thickets of the *queñoa* tree, which, along with Himalayan pines, share the world-altitude record for trees. Animals of the *páramo* include Andean foxes, deer and *vicuña*, a wild, golden-colored relative of the llama.

CENTRAL ANDEAN REGION

Another unique ecosystem exists between the coast and the *cordillera*, from northern Chile to northern Peru. The coastal Atacama Desert, the

'Glaciers on the equator – whoa, this place is weird.'
Traveler reflecting on her whereabouts.

The Amazon River, from its inconspicuous source in the Peruvian highlands to its mouth near Belém, Brazil, measures more than 6200km. Its flow is 12 times that of the Mississippi, it carries one-fifth of the world's freshwater and its discharge into the Atlantic every 24 hours equals that of the Thames in a full year.

Believe it or not, there are still uncontacted tribes in the Amazon. One of the most notable is the Tageiri, a band of the Ecuadorian Huaorani, which has refused all attempts at contact by the outside world, sometimes with violence.

world's driest, is almost utterly barren in the rain shadow of the Andes. The cold Peru current (also called the Humboldt current) moderates the temperature at this tropical latitude and produces convective fogs (*garúa* or *camanchaca*) that support hillside vegetation (*lomas*) in the coastal ranges.

SAVANNAS

Savannas are vast, low-altitude, primarily treeless tropical and semitropical grasslands. Because of their openness, they can be the best places to observe wildlife in South America. The most famous example is Brazil's Pantanal, which spills over into Bolivia. Other savannas include the Venezuelan *llanos* and, to a lesser extent, the pampas of southern Brazil and Argentina.

TROPICAL DRY FORESTS

Hot areas with well-defined wet and dry seasons support the growth of dry forests. In South America these climatic conditions are mostly found near the coast in the northern part of the continent. Because many of these coastal regions have a dense and growing population, tropical dry forest is a fast-disappearing habitat – only about 1% remains undisturbed. The majestic bottle-trunk *Ceiba* (or kapok) tree is the forest's most definitive species. It has a massively bulging trunk and seasonal white flowers that dangle like lightbulbs from otherwise bare tree branches. Parrots, parrotlets, monkeys and a variety of reptiles inhabit these forests.

MANGROVES

Found in coastal areas of Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, the Guianas and Venezuela, mangroves are trees with a remarkable ability to grow in salt water. They have a broadly spreading system of intertwining stilt roots to support the tree in unstable sandy or silty soils. Mangrove forests trap sediments and build up a rich organic soil, which in turn supports other plants. Mangrove roots provide a protected habitat for many types of fish, mollusks and crustaceans, while the branches provide nesting areas for sea birds.

National Parks

There are over 200 national parks in South America and a staggering number of provincial parks and private reserves. They are undeniably one of the continent's highlights, covering every terrain imaginable, from tropical rainforest and cloud forest to Andean *páramo* to tropical and temperate coastal regions. The most popular parks have well-developed tourist infrastructures and high-season crowds and are fairly easy to reach. Some parks have only faint trails, basic camping facilities or refuges and, if you're lucky, a park ranger to answer questions. Others are impossible to reach without 4WD transport or a private boat. Maps are generally tough to come by, so if you plan to do any trekking, research the park first and check larger cities for topographical map sources. See Maps in both the South America Directory (p1068) and in individual country directories for information on where to obtain maps.

Environmental Issues

Deforestation – of the Amazon rainforest, the temperate forests of Chile and Argentina, the coastal mangroves and cloud forests of Ecuador, and the Chocó bioregion of Pacific Panama, Colombia and Ecuador – is perhaps the single greatest environmental problem facing South America. Oil exploration has opened pristine tracts of Amazon rainforest to colonization and

has lead to large-scale toxic spills and the poisoning of rivers and streams. Conservation of Brazil's Pantanal, the largest wetland in the world, may soon take backseat to more profitable industrial projects such as the Bolivia–Brazil natural-gas pipeline, hydroelectric projects, a thermal electric plant, mills and mining. The list goes on, and the best way to help is to study up and get involved. The following websites are great starting points:

Amazon Watch (www.amazonwatch.org)

Ancient Forests International (www.ancientforests.org)

Conservation International (CI; www.conservation.org)

Rainforest Action Network (RAN; www.ran.org)

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