

South America

South America is part of the Americas and a continent of superlatives.

The world's biggest rainforest and the largest river by discharge (Amazon), the highest mountain range outside Asia (the Andes), remote islands (Galapagos Islands, Easter Island and Fernando de Noronha), heavenly beaches (such as in Brazil's Northeastern region), wide deserts (Atacama), icy landscapes (Patagonia & Tierra del Fuego), the world's tallest waterfall (the 979-m Angel Falls, in Venezuela) and one of the largest (Iguaçu Falls, Argentina and Brazil), as well as several other breathtaking natural attractions.



Aerial view of the Amazon rainforest

Humans have left their mark on the continent too: from ancient ruins (Machu Picchu and other Inca cities; the Moai in Easter Island) and the oldest rock paintings in the Americas (at the Serra da Capivara) to world-class metropolises (São Paulo, Buenos Aires, Bogotá, Caracas, Santiago, Lima and Rio de Janeiro), outstanding modern and European architecture (Brasília, Buenos Aires), and charming cities built in the Andes (Caracas, Medellín, Quito, Santiago de Chile). Strong African heritage (in Salvador, Rio and Montevideo), genuine indigenous culture (Belém, Manaus, Cuzco, Lima, La Paz), and Eastern influence (São Paulo's enormous Japanese community) mingle with the fingerprints of Iberian colonizers. Ushuaia, the world's southernmost city, and some of its biggest festivities, such as Rio's Carnival and Belem's Cirio de Nazaré, the Tango World Championship, and the Vendimia festival in Argentina, are also part of this incredibly diverse and attractive continent.

Countries and territories

Argentina

Once known for being a 'European nation in South America', Argentina offers a dynamic and rich cultural life in its cities, and sparsely-populated grasslands, mountains and glacial parks in the south.

Bolivia

This landlocked country is arguably the only one in Latin America with an ethnic majority of indigenous people, and a culture that is much affected by the high altitude of the Andes.

Brazil

South America's only Portuguese-speaking country is also its biggest, offering the Amazon rainforest along with vibrant cities such as Rio de Janeiro.

Chile

A long, thin sliver of land on the western side of the Andes which stands out on any map, this country contains big parts of the Atacama, one of the driest deserts in the world.

Colombia

After decades of violence, Colombia is now a much safer destination, offering coffee, jungles, volcanoes and two coastlines with a strong Caribbean feel.

Ecuador

Straddling the Equator, this small country offers incredible diversity across its four regions: the Amazon Rainforest, the Andes, the Pacific Coast and the unique Galapagos Islands.

Falkland Islands

While most only think of the 1982 war and the ongoing dispute with Argentina, this piece of the UK in the South Atlantic has much to offer, including Antarctic wildlife and far-reaching views across remote landscapes.

French Guiana

The French part of South America is also part of the European Union and the launchpad of Europe's main spaceport.

Guyana

The only English-speaking country on mainland South America, featuring highlands, waterfalls and rainforest.

Paraguay

Possibly the least visited country on the continent, in flat Paraguay you can see Jesuit missions, some major rivers and the impressive Itaipú Dam and hear the native Guaraní language.

Peru

The historic heartland of the Incas, this country still offers a lot of Inca heritage (Machu Picchu being the most visited site) plus the Nazca lines, made by an earlier culture for a still not entirely clear purpose.

Suriname

This former Dutch colony offers a unique mix of Caribbean, Asian, Dutch and Latin American.

Uruguay

As *fútbol*-crazy as its neighbors of Argentina and Brazil, Uruguay also offers beaches, lovely historic towns, and a laid-back lifestyle.

Venezuela

You may think only of oil and socialism, but Venezuela also offers jungles, waterfalls, major cities like Maracaibo and Caracas and Lake Maracaibo, one of the biggest lakes or bays (depending on whom you ask) in the world.



Cities

- Bogotá — a city of contrasts with a hectic balance between the new and the old; the most cultural-minded of South American capitals
- Buenos Aires — the city of tango and most cosmopolitan in Argentina
- Caracas — full of theaters, malls, museums, art galleries, parks and well-conserved colonial architecture
- La Paz — built in a canyon, the highest national capital in the world
- Lima — the sprawling, Pacific coast capital of Peru is a center of cuisine



São Paulo skyline

- Montevideo — the pleasant capital city of Uruguay, situated on the east bank of the Rio de la Plata
- Rio de Janeiro — famous for its breathtaking landscape, its laidback beach culture and its annual carnival
- Santiago de Chile — capital of Chile with many museums, events, theaters, restaurants and bars
- São Paulo — a hive of activity that offers a jovial nightlife and a diverse cultural experience

Other destinations

- The Andes – the world's longest mountain range, and the highest outside of Asia
- Canaima National Park – its main attraction are the Angel Falls, at 978 m, the highest waterfall on Earth
- Easter Island – an isolated Polynesian island famous for its mysterious history and giant stone statues
- Galapagos Islands – isolated islands with unique wildlife: this is where Darwin saw the evidence for natural selection
- Iguaçu Falls – breathtaking waterfalls on the border between Argentina and Brazil
- Machu Picchu – high in the mountains, the lost city of the Incas is a spectacular set of ruins
- The Pantanal – large wetlands with diverse wildlife
- Salar de Uyuni – Bolivia's seemingly endless salt flats
- Tierra del Fuego – islands at the tip of South America, with rugged scenery, boat trips, and winter activities



Machu Picchu in Peru

See also the sections on South America in the UNESCO World Heritage List.

Understand

History

See also: Indigenous cultures of South America

Before the arrival of the Europeans in the 16th century, the continent was home to different native American peoples, the most prominent being the Incas, whose empire stretched across much of the Andes, along the Inca Trails that are popular with trekkers today. Warfare and new diseases the colonizers brought with them had a negative impact on the native population. Eventually the entire continent was conquered by Spain and Portugal, with some other countries establishing colonies in the northeast, one of which - French Guiana still belongs to a European nation. The last indigenous polity to hold out was the Mapuche in what is now Southern Chile, who were only conquered after Chilean independence. As a legacy of this, virtually all of the continent is today either Spanish- or Portuguese-speaking, nevertheless, native cultures

and languages are still alive in Bolivia and Peru, and the Guaraní language is spoken today by many Paraguayans without any indigenous heritage whatsoever. The continent is also pretty diverse, with almost any ethnicity you can think of having a presence, including Jews, Italians, Germans, Afro-Latinos, Japanese (mostly in Peru and Brazil), Indians (mostly in Guyana and Suriname), Chinese and various combinations of European, African and Indigenous.

Following a series of wars in the early 19th century, the colonies became independent and countries emerged largely in the form we know them today. The history of the continent has however not been without trouble, with (civil) wars, coups and periods of dictatorship occurring until the end of the 20th century. Nevertheless, as with North America and Oceania, South America was and to some extent still is a popular destination for immigrants, first from Europe and later on also from other parts of the world.

Geography and climate

Two prominent geographical features of South America are the Amazon rainforest and the Andes. South of the Tropic of Capricorn the landscape is savanna on the east coast and as a rule of thumb, it gets dryer the further west one goes. West of the Andes you can find the driest place in the world — the Atacama Desert. Patagonia, covering much of the southernmost 2/3 of Argentina and Chile is cool and dry with steppe and some forest, somewhat reminiscent of Central Asia or the North American prairie.

Much of the continent is situated in the tropics and in these places the climate is defined by wet and dry seasons and constantly warm or hot temperatures (except for high-altitude locations in the Andes). The further south one goes, the more temperate the climate becomes and in Ushuaia (the southernmost city in the world) weather conditions are even reminiscent of coastal northern Scandinavia.

Culture

Football (soccer) is popular all over the continent, and it is often said that football is not just a sport but a religion. It is common to see children in rural areas and slums playing football in the street, and top level football matches often attract sold-out crowds. By far the most famous rivalry on the continent is that between the two giants of Brazil and Argentina. Men's national teams compete in the *Copa América*, whose standard of football is generally regarded to be on par with the European Championships. The South American continental championship for clubs is known as the *Copa Libertadores*, and the standard of football is generally regarded to be good, but somewhat lower than in the UEFA Champions' League as most of the top South American footballers play for European clubs.

Linguistically and religiously, the continent is rather homogenous with Romance languages and Catholicism being the "norm" in almost all countries. In the latter half of the 20th century, American-style Evangelical Christianity and irreligion started making major inroads, the former mostly among the poor and the latter often among urban and university-educated youth. Pockets of indigenous religions survive though, and every winter solstice, the indigenous people in Cuzco, Peru re-enact the traditional Inca festival of the sun god, Inti Raymi.

Peru and Bolivia are probably the best places to experience pre-Columbian culture with traditional dishes, clothing, handicraft and language still around together with attractions like Machu Picchu or Tiwanaku.

Topics in South America

Topics in Argentina

Topics in Ecuador

Get in

By plane

Main article: Flying to South America

Getting to South America has gotten much easier due to massive increases in flights to the continent by major global airlines. Although some particular places are still quite hard to reach (e.g. Paraguay, Suriname, northern Brazil), the places that you most likely want to go, such as Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro–Galeão International Airport, are more accessible than ever before.



Santiago de Chile Airport is one of the major points of entry to South America.

- From **Africa**: the only (reliable) options worth considering would be the South African Airways service linking O. R. Tambo International Airport with São Paulo - Guarulhos; or the Ethiopian Airlines service from Addis Ababa to Rio de Janeiro–Galeão International Airport and São Paulo - Guarulhos. There are also connections between Luanda and Rio de Janeiro, Salvador de Bahia and Recife with Taag Angola Airlines. Do realize that demand between Africa and South America is very limited, so even the aforementioned services are infrequent and fares may be quite high.
- From **Asia**: Be prepared for a very long journey, especially if your itinerary includes connecting flights to travel to/beyond the major Asian and South American hubs. São Paulo - Guarulhos is the only destination with flights from the Far East. The Korean Air route between Seoul-Incheon and São Paulo - Guarulhos involves a stop in the United States (LAX) therefore it will require all passengers, including those in transit, to pass through U.S. customs and immigration. Air China flies to São Paulo from Beijing Capital via Madrid Barajas. From the Middle East there are some more alternatives; Emirates (Dubai), Etihad (Abu Dhabi) and Qatar Airways (Doha) all fly nonstop to São Paulo. Of these Qatar Airways continues down to Buenos Aires and Emirates has another line to South America — via Rio de Janeiro–Galeão International Airport to Buenos Aires.
- From **Australia, New Zealand**, and the **South Pacific**: A somewhat surprising number of options exist. LATAM Airlines serve Auckland and Sydney from their hub at Santiago. Qantas introduced a non-stop service between Sydney and Santiago in March 2012, and Air New Zealand flies direct from Auckland to Buenos Aires. LATAM also operates one of the world's most obscure flights of all - a service linking Santiago-Easter Island-Tahiti. From Perth Emirates provides affordable flights to Buenos Aires with a stopover in Dubai, around 30 hours total flying time.
- From **Europe**: The political, social, and economic ties between (former) colonies and their (former) metropolises remain strong. Portuguese flag carrier TAP Airlines is by far the leading foreign carrier to Brazil, serving a slew of destinations in North and East Brazil as well as the Brazilian capital Brasilia which otherwise have only limited or absolutely no other international connections. Spanish flag carrier Iberia flies to most of the former Spanish colonies, although neither Bolivia nor Paraguay are served. KLM flies between Amsterdam Schiphol and Suriname and Air France links Paris-Orly with French Guiana. Of course, such services are not exclusive - KLM also flies to Lima, TAP to Caracas, Air France to Rio de

Janeiro–Galeão International Airport and Lima, etc. Other leading European airlines such as British Airways, Lufthansa, Swiss Airlines, and ITA Airways also serve key South American gateways from their respective hubs, while South American airlines also operate into several major European cities as well. Air Europa also flies to many South American cities via their Madrid hub and connecting flights mainly across Western Europe.

- From **North America**: Historically Miami airport has been the main gateway to South America from the US, however hubs at Atlanta airport, Dallas/Fort Worth, Fort Lauderdale, Houston, Benito Juárez International Airport, New York, Newark Liberty Airport, Orlando, Toronto, and Washington-Dulles offer viable alternatives, with airlines such as Air Canada, United and Delta Air Lines and American Airlines. American discount carriers such as Spirit Airlines and JetBlue now serve Colombia, Brazil and Peru. Latin American carriers such as Avianca, LATAM and Copa Airlines provide good hubs in the region.

By car

Although it looks like there is a land connection with the Pan-American Highway, there are actually no roads connecting Panama with Colombia through the infamous **Darien Gap** and hence it is not possible to drive from Central America. People overcome this problem by shipping their cars from Colon (Atlantic side in Panama) to Cartagena or Barranquilla (Colombia), or from Panama City (Pacific side of the Panama canal) to Buenaventura (Colombia) or Guayaquil (Ecuador).

Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, Peru and Brazil have good roads. Night time driving is generally dangerous on this continent.

By train

There are no railroads between Panama and Colombia, so you can't enter the continent by train.

Around South America trains are not often the best option or even an option, as most lines have been neglected for most of the last decades. Some lines do however offer the chance to see amazing scenery.

By boat

There are a couple of ferries linking Panama and Colombia, and they are also the only way to get a car from Central to South America.

Some cruise liners cover the towns in the lower Caribbean (Cartagena, Santa Marta, Margarita Island). [Royal Caribbean](http://www.royalcaribbean.com) (<http://www.royalcaribbean.com>), [Holland America](http://www.hollandamerica.com) (<http://www.hollandamerica.com>), [Princess Cruises](http://www.princess.com) (<http://www.princess.com>), [spanish line Pullmantur](http://www.pullmantur.es) (<http://www.pullmantur.es>)

Get around

Visas

The Union of South American Nations gives visa-free access and a customs union between all countries in South America. With the exception of Suriname, visitors from industrialized countries *generally* do not need visas anywhere in South America. Exceptions are mainly in off-the-beaten-path countries; for instance, American, Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand citizens need a visa on arrival for Paraguay as

a tit-for-tat for fees Paraguayan citizens pay for those countries' visas. Also, citizens of Russia, Turkey and some Asian countries don't need visas in most of South America, and very few nationalities have to obtain a visa for entering Ecuador. Yellow fever vaccinations may be necessary to enter some countries.

By plane

For longer distances, consider flying. In South America international flights are usually from capital to capital with domestic flights from the capital (the exceptions to this are São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro with flights to all over the continent). Some airlines, like Aerolineas Argentinas have remarkable discounts on domestic connections if arriving on their intercontinental flights. The oneworld alliance offers an flight pass (<http://www.oneworld.com/flights/single-continent-fares/visit-south-america>) which might be a smart choice if you plan a longer South American tour. South America has thus far not seen the explosion of low cost airlines that have happened in Europe, Asia and even Africa to some extent and - mostly for political reasons - international flights can be surprisingly expensive. A flight within the continent can be as expensive or even more expensive than an intercontinental connection to get you to South America in the first place.

By train

There are no cross-country train services in South America, and with the exception of Argentina and Chile, domestic networks are quite limited. Unfortunately for most of the second half of the 20th century networks have been cut and service has been reduced. There has been a renaissance of sorts, but in most cases it has thus far (2015) resulted in more talks than actual construction. There are a number of very scenic "tourist trains" though, including the 445-km Quito-Guayaquil route in Ecuador. The spectacular "tren a las nubes" (train to the clouds) running on a route that formerly connected Argentina and Chile, but only on a portion within Argentina, is the highest train in South America.

By bus

Buses are the main form of land transportation for much of the continent, they represent an economical but slower alternative to flying.

Beyond very cheap chicken buses, long distance buses fall under 3 general comfort levels: Semicama, Cama, Cama Suite. These names tend to shift from country to country.

Be aware that although most of the violence of the Cold war era is over some parts of some countries are still not entirely safe and crossing them by bus might not be a smart idea. For more on that issue read the stay safe sections of the respective country, region or city articles.



The main boulevard in Chuy is also the border between Uruguay and Brazil



Bus in the desert of Bolivia, between Potosí and Uyuni

South America bus classes

Country	Semicama (Half bed)	Cama (Bed)	Cama Suite (Bed Suite)
Argentina	Semicama 40°	Cama-Ejecutivo 55°	Cama Suite 85°
Chile	Semi Cama 60°	Cama 65°	Cama Premium 90°
Peru	Semicama/Imperial/Especial 40-50°	Cama/VIP 70-75°	Super Cama/Super VIP/Sofá Cama 90°
Brazil	Executivo 40°	Semi-Leito 55°	Leito 80°

By boat

You can go from Montevideo to Valparaiso by cruise, touching Falkland Islands, Ushuaia and Puerto Montt. Or with an extension to Antarctica.

Also along the South American coast from Buenos Aires up to Brazil. You can do all the Amazon River by boat, starting in Peru, through all Brazil.

Between Argentina and Uruguay you can cross Rio de la Plata by ferry.

There are also all kinds of boat along the Amazon river.

Talk

Spanish is the official language in all countries except Brazil, Guyana, Suriname and French Guiana, and is widely spoken even in the countries that are not historically Spanish speaking. The dialect varies between countries although all are *noticeably different* from the 'Castilian Spanish' standard found in Spain or the Mexican dialect taught to many students in the Southwestern US.

Portuguese is the official language in Brazil, which comprises about half the population and land area of the continent. Note that the dialect is very different to that of Portuguese spoken in Portugal. Spanish and Portuguese are closely related and knowing one will provide you some basic communication ability in the other.



If you've studied "Spanish" Spanish, be prepared for some confusion

In the border area between Uruguay and Brazil some people are fluent in an ad hoc mishmash of Portuguese and Spanish known as *portuñol* and it is certainly viable for crude communication if you don't speak the other language, though Portuguese speakers tend to have an easier time understanding Spanish than vice versa.

Much like the English language, expressions and slang terms can change dramatically from country to country or even city to city. As words that have a totally innocuous meaning in one place can have a vulgar or "dirty" meaning elsewhere, it is good to do some research before using words like "coger" (meaning "take" in Spain, and a vulgar reference to sexual intercourse in most of Spanish America) or "bicha" (meaning "a line of people waiting" in Portugal, but a very derogatory way of referring to a gay man in Brazil) in the wrong context and possibly offending people or causing puerile snickering instead of getting a serious answer.

There are also many indigenous peoples living in South America who speak their own languages, and if you are really going off the beaten track, you might have to learn them too. The most notable Native American languages in South America are Quechua (Bolivia and Peru) and Guaraní (80% of the population of Paraguay). In the Falkland Islands and Guyana, **English** is the official language, while in Suriname and French Guiana, the official languages are **Dutch** and **French** respectively.

With the exception of Suriname, second-language English proficiency tends to be poor throughout the continent. That said, many people working in the tourism industry, as well as business people who regularly deal with foreign clients, speak a conversational level of English.

See

A sizable number of the **world's largest, longest or highest natural wonders** are located in South America. Perhaps the first thing you will notice when looking on a map of the continent is the world's largest **rainforest**, the Amazon, covering much of Brazil. Moreover it also features the world's largest wetlands, Pantanal, Angel Falls, the world's highest **waterfall** as well as the better known Iguaçu Falls. Other bodies of water worth mentioning include the Amazon river (by some measures the world's longest river and the one with the largest drainage basin), the world's highest commercially navigable body of water Lake Titicaca, and the wide Rio de la Plata (between Uruguay and Argentina) which is more like a bay of the Atlantic Ocean.



Lake Titicaca and traditional handicraft

In the west lies the "backbone" of the continent — **the Andes**. This mountain chain, which is the longest in the world, contains Aconcagua which at a height of almost 7,000 m is the highest mountain outside Asia. As the Earth is at its thickest at the Equator, the peak of Chimborazo (6,268 m) is the point in the world furthest away from the center of the Earth. Right next to these mighty mountains lays the Atacama desert which is the driest and possibly oldest in the world. The white spot that can be seen on satellite footage is the Salar de Uyuni. Located at 3,656 m above the sea level it is — you guessed it — the world's largest salt flat.

The Galapagos Islands, 1,000 km off the coast, feature a **unique and fearless fauna** (see Galapagos wildlife). There are several iconic and unique animals on the mainland too (see South and Central American wildlife), including llamas and other camelids, jaguars, capybaras, opossums and monkeys and on the other hand less pleasant creatures that are poisonous or spread tropical diseases. Another, equally famous island in the Pacific is Easter Island.



The world's largest rodent species, capybara, is endemic to South America

While most people would think of South America as rainforest or desert, this is mostly but not entirely true — Los Glaciares National Park in southwestern Argentina will prove otherwise. Overall the climate and landscape of the far south actually recalls Norway or parts of Canada. Here you can find Ushuaia, the world's southernmost city and a gateway to Antarctica. South America also holds the record for the **world's highest national capital** La Paz, and at Chacaltaya you will find the world's highest located ski resort.

It's certainly not only in modern times that people have lived and worked in the Andes even at altitudes where you are likely to contract altitude sickness. Particularly in Peru and Bolivia, you will find many **beautiful and famous archaeological sites** from the age before the Europeans, connected by pre-

Columbian Inca Trails if you want to get around the traditional way. Among them the most famous is undoubtedly Machu Picchu, but places like Chan Chan and Tiwanaku are also deservedly inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List. Peru also features the Nazca lines, constructed 1500 years ago for an unknown purpose and only visible from air.



The Pelican, one of the mystical figures in Nazca

The **European heritage** includes mining towns in the mountains, unsurprisingly a lot of churches and missions and other colonial architecture along the coasts. Of course, in places like São Paulo, Buenos Aires and Santiago de Chile you can also see skyscrapers archetypical to any metropolis in the world. And let's not forget about Rio de Janeiro with its world-famous beaches Copacabana and Ipanema with the Sugarloaf mountain, Pão de Açúcar, in the background.

South America offers a variety of **cultural experiences**. In the Andes, native traditions and languages still live strong. The east and south of the continent is more of a blend of cultures that immigrants from Europe, Africa and other parts of the world have brought with them; probably the best example of this is the Brazilian carnival.



The carnival in Rio is the largest and probably most famous in the world

Itineraries

See also: *South America itineraries*

- Buenos Aires to Machu Picchu overland
- Caminhos do Imigrante
- Colombia to Patagonia overland
- El Choro Trek
- Estrada Real
- Jesuit Missions of the Chiquitos
- Inca Trail
- Paraguay River
- Voyaging along the Amazon River

Do

- Tango in Buenos Aires, Argentina and Montevideo, Uruguay
- Travel the wilderness in a Jeep on the Salar de Uyuni, Bolivia
- Cycle down the Death Road outside La Paz, Bolivia
- Soak up the sun on the famous beaches of Brazil
- Explore the pristine jungle in the many nature reserves of the Amazon rainforest
- Bike through old Dutch plantations in Suriname
- Ski on the Andes in Chile or Argentina



Salar de Uyuni

- Experience a football (soccer) match anywhere in South America

Hiking

As home to the Andes, the **longest mountain range in the world**, South America is a huge destination for hiking and trekking. The Andes are magnificent and breathtakingly beautiful, and their terrain varies from snowy peaks to stark passes to lush forests. Peru is probably the most famous trekking destination, including the world-famous Inca Trail and many lesser-known but equally rewarding journeys. Bolivia also has many popular peaks climbable by non-experienced mountaineers on tours, and a lot of unknown but equally beautiful 1- to 12-day hikes through the mountains and into the rain forest. Argentina and Chile, with their long Andean border, have a wide variety of hikes as well. In fact, almost every country on the continent has beautiful mountains with great hikes, the exceptions being low-lying Paraguay, Suriname, and Uruguay.

Buy

Some national currencies experience volatility from time to time, in the 2010s most notably Venezuela, where the official exchange rate of the Bolivar is laughably disconnected from reality. In most countries the **US dollar** often used alongside local currencies, and prices of goods worth over a few hundred dollars may actually be quoted in US dollars.



The Ecuadorian centavo is used alongside US dollars and dollar coins in Ecuador.

- In Ecuador, the official paper currency is the US dollar, while the government mints its own coinage, set equal to the US coins. In much of South America, US gold dollar coins are used commonly, and are often included in transactions.
- With respect to Venezuela, the Bolivar fuerte is worth much less than its official value and you basically have to use the black market if you don't want your stay to become very expensive.
- There is also limited use of euros (in French Guiana) and British pound sterling (in the Falkland Islands). Currencies other than US dollars tend to be of little use and hard to exchange outside their immediate area of use and adjacent border areas.

Eat

See also: Argentine cuisine, Brazilian cuisine

South American cuisine is as diverse and colorful as its people. The continent's wide range of terrains brings forward a broad selection of food products and its many people all have their own ways of cultivating and preparing the land's goods.

After the “discovery” of America, European settlers, African slaves and immigrants from other parts of the world all brought their own food traditions with them, adapting them to include local ingredients and cooking techniques. They also introduced a new set of meats, crops and spices to the culinary blend. The result is a most interesting mix of flavors. World-famous dishes include feijoada,



Peruvian ceviche — raw spicy seafood served with vegetables

ceviche, empanadas and of course Argentina's barbecued steaks. Widely used ingredients include corn, potatoes, chilli peppers and lima beans.

Less well-known in the rest of the world but much used by the indigenous people of South America are grains like quinoa and kiwicha, queso fresco (a fresh cow's milk cheese) and yuca (also known as cassava). For a taste of traditional Andean meats, try alpaca or guinea pig (*cuy* - pronounced *kwee*). To top it all off, enjoy one of the many very sweet desserts, often combined with delicious tropical fruits that grow here.

Drink

South America offers a wide variety of drinks, some of which you can only legally consume in their country of origin (that would be coca tea, made from the leaf of the coca plant, supposedly a good way to combat the problems high altitude brings with it). Other drinks include yerba mate, a hot tea-like infusion, and Inca Cola, an alternative to the iconic American soft drink brand.

Keep in mind that coca leaves, sweets, beer, tea (bags) and other products are illegal in some countries in South America, including Brazil and Paraguay, and in the vast majority of countries outside South America. So be sure to get rid of any and all traces of coca tea or leaves before crossing international borders or otherwise leaving the few countries where coca is legal.

Sleep

The types of lodging available are the same as in North America and Europe. For the backpackers the best option is hostel or camping. However, hotel rooms (like most other non-imported goods and services) are with a few exceptions rather affordable compared to North America and Western Europe. Pests are a risk if you are sleeping outdoors, especially in the tropical parts of the continent.

Work

Many countries have specific working needs, requirements and conditions (e.g. visa). Check each country individually.

Volunteering

Working as a volunteer, learning Spanish and seeing the country on a shoestring is popular with many travellers in South America. Mostly people with lot of time opt for this kind of travelling, getting to know the country and its people.

Volunteering can be done as part of a large organisation, or for local families. When working with or for local families, they often provide you with food and accommodation for about 3-5 hr work per day. Such engagements can be found with any of the following websites, which differ by length and type of stay: Workaway (<https://www.workaway.info/>), HelpX (<https://www.helpx.net/>), Wwoof (<http://wwoof.net/>), and Worldpackers (<https://www.worldpackers.com/>). The website generally demand a small commission or a yearly fee.

Use the rating system of these websites to determine good and reliable hosts. And beware, many locals just use those websites to find cheap labour, offering a terrible experience, sometimes no food or no decent accommodation. Avoid such offers, which are just badly managed businesses, and opt for placements that really depend on volunteers (like green farming, education, NGOs, etc.).

Avoid paying for volunteering. You can also contact a bunch of international NGOs and let them know you are interested in working for them. Sometimes you can also get a paid job after doing some volunteer work. Just be clear that you are able to stay a fixed amount of time for unpaid work, and that you would need some money to continue your work.

Cope

You will find many other travellers in South America, often doing the same route as you. It is fun and useful to travel together with others; rent a car together to save money, hike together for a more secure experience, or just share your knowledge on the way about dangers, volunteering, secret gems, or any other valuable information. Relying on this information and help is useful and important, as can be seen with this travel guide.

Facebook, for instance, has many local country groups available, like the [Argentina & Chile Backpacker / Traveler group](https://www.facebook.com/groups/ArgentinaChileBackpackerTraveler/) (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/ArgentinaChileBackpackerTraveler/>) and the [Bolivia, Paraguay, Uruguay Backpacker / Traveler group](https://www.facebook.com/groups/BoliviaParaguayUruguayBackpackerTraveler/) (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/BoliviaParaguayUruguayBackpackerTraveler/>) where you can find other travellers and up-to-date information on the country. Also, hostels often have black boards available where you can sell and find stuff, or contact local travellers. Otherwise, just talk to the people that look like they need help or if you are trying to find help yourself.

Stay safe

South America has some reputation for **crime**, including armed robberies, with Brazil, Colombia and Venezuela being noted as the most dangerous. Read up beforehand about the individual destinations you're planning to visit. As with anywhere else in the world, the right travel planning can mitigate any dangers.

Wearing or carrying items which may identify you as an affluent tourist can be a mistake. You shouldn't pack anything that you would be upset to lose. Leave expensive jewelry, watches and other items of value at home and only carry what you need. That goes for credit cards and other documents as well; if you have no need for them leave them behind in the hotel safe, only take what money you are likely to spend with you.

While tropical storms are rare, **flash floods** do occur in various parts of South America. [Earthquakes](#) and to some extent [volcanic eruptions](#) are a risk in the Andean countries, especially Chile.

Stay healthy

Tap water in many countries is not drinkable; it's wise to purify your own or buy bottled water. The countries with safe tap water are [Argentina](#), [Chile](#), and [Uruguay](#). In [Colombia](#), the tap water is drinkable in Bogotá, but it is not recommended to drink tap water in drier regions of the country.

Malaria, **dengue** and **yellow fever** can be a risk as well on the continent, so check with a travel clinic or your doctor before heading out to see if you'll be in a high-risk area, and receive any vaccinations and medication required.

The [Andean](#) countries include areas at high altitudes, making **altitude sickness** a risk. This is especially a concern in several popular destinations in [Peru](#) and [Bolivia](#).

Connect

The reliability of postal services in South America tends to be iffy. If you have something important to send, it's wise to use a private company rather than the government-run services. Also, some countries' governments impose heavy import taxes or significant limitations on imports, which may cause problems if you or your friends back home try to send packages to the continent.

Internet access is widespread, but speed varies. Government internet censorship is rare.

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