JOURNEY
LATIN AMERICA



PRIVATE JOURNEYS WITH JOURNEY LATIN

OFF THE BEATEN TRACK ARGENTINA: REMOTE PUNA ADVENTURE

13 days from **£5,700pp**

ARGENTINA / BUENOS AIRES / SALTA



WHY US

We are the UK's No.1 specialist in travel to Latin America and have been creating award-winning holidays to every corner of the region for over four decades; we pride ourselves on being the most knowledgeable people there are when it comes to travel to Central and South America and passionate about it too.

OUR JOURNEY

As our name suggests, we are single-minded about Latin America. This is what sets us apart from other travel companies – and what allows us to offer you not just a holiday but the opportunity to experience something extraordinary on inspiring journeys throughout Mexico, Central and South America.

WE LOVE LATIN AMERICA

A passion for the region runs through all we do

All our Consultants have lived or travelled extensively in Latin America

Up-to-the-minute knowledge underpinned by 40 years' experience

TRAVEL WITH CONFIDENCE

Fully bonded and licensed

ATOL-protected

On your side when it matters

Book with confidence, knowing every penny is secure

THE REAL LATIN AMERICA

Our insider knowledge helps you go beyond the guidebooks

We hand-pick hotels with character and the most rewarding excursions

Let us show you the Latin America we know and love

OVERVIEW & OUTLINE ITINERARY

A truly extraordinary and adventurous guided expedition to explore virtually uninhabited and exquisite high altitude Andean Atacama desert in Argentina.

DAY 1	**Arrive Buenos Aires.**
DAY 2	**Guided walking tour of Retiro and Recoleta.**
DAY 3	**Fly to Salta. Afternoon guided walking tour.**
DAY 4	**At leisure in Salta. Optional day walks.**
DAY 5	**Your expedition begins: drive to Purmamarca.**
DAY 6	**Enter the Puna: drive to Tolar Grande.**
DAY 7	**Explore the Puna from Tolar Grande.**
DAY 8	**Further explorations of the Puna en route to El Peñon.**
DAY 9	**Explore the unique, pearl-white pumice fields.**
DAY 10	**Leave the Puna and descend to Cafayate.**
DAY 11	**At leisure in Cafayate.**
DAY 12	**Return to Salta airport via Las Conchas Canyon, fly to Buenos Aires.**
DAY 13	**Transfer to the airport for international flight.**

ITINERARY

Feeling as remote as the wilderness of Amazonia or Antarctica, the Puna de Atacama is a vast, other-worldly, arid landscape of extremes. On your six-day, guided expeditionary road trip you will be almost alone in rarefied, high-altitude desert mountain scenery as alien as the surface of Mars.

A rugged plateau straddling Argentina and Chile, the Puna has intensely varied scenery with high mountain passes, salt-carpeted depressions and a crescent of volcanoes within which are glass-still lakes, pewter-shaded lava fields, ochre-hued volcanic cones and silvery pumice desert, slashed through by glacial streams. It's immense: the size of England, dotted with just a handful of hamlets. The region has been inhabited in the past: Inca ruins stab the volcanic peaks and ghost towns - abandoned mining villages - are fascinating to explore.

Your holiday here is bookended with a brief discovery of two of Argentina's most fascinating historic cities, Buenos Aires and Salta.

DAY 1

Arrive Buenos Aires.

You'll be staying in a central hotel. Buenos Aires is probably the most cosmopolitan metropolis in South America. Certainly it looks more European than the others: wide boulevards, Italianate architecture, art deco cafeterias and designer label shops. This seductive (though in some places following economic difficulties a bit shabby) city oozes atmosphere and nostalgia, with its colonial buildings, antique markets, shady squares and tango halls.

DAY 2

Guided walking tour of Retiro and Recoleta.

In the early 20th century the city's aristocracy enjoyed huge prosperity. Looking to the Old World for inspiration, leading families copied the graceful architecture of belle époque France, covering the upmarket residential areas of Retiro and Recoleta with palatial façades lining shady cobbled boulevards. This walking tour takes you to former palaces and mansions which now have much more practical functions; the Military Society, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the National Parks HQ. Follow meandering Arroyo street with its art galleries, and finally stroll down the illustrious Avenida Alvear.

DAY 3

Fly to Salta. Afternoon guided walking tour.

The city of Salta is renowned for its colonial architecture, friendly population and claret-red ponchos. It lies at the foot of the eastern slopes of the Andes, in the only Argentine region where vestiges of indian heritage are still visible.
Your guided walking tour of the attractive city introduces you to some lovely baroque colonial buildings including the sumptuous cathedral on the main square. You'll also enjoy views over the view of the city from San Bernardo Hill reached by cable car.

DAY 4

At leisure in Salta. Optional day walks.

We recommend a visit to the MAAM (High Altitude Archaeology) Museum which reverently displays one or more of the perfectly preserved mummies of sacrificed children found high in the Andes.

If you fancy a trip out of town, there are some good day walks in the Salta region which we can pre-book for you. Nearby San Lorenzo has trails leading into cloud-forested hills which are popular with local people at weekends. For more of a work-out, another option is an energetic hike on the higher-altitude Cuesta del Obispo with impressive mountain views.

DAY 5

Your expedition begins: drive to Purmamarca.

Your guide and vehicle for your private expedition will meet you at your hotel, where you will have a briefing (the briefing may be the previous evening). The adventurous road trip begins with a scenic journey to the sunlit Humahuaca gorge, one of north-west Argentina's better-known attractions, where you spend the first night in the quaint village of Purmamarca.

Purmamarca is a small town in the gorge, whose multi-coloured eroded rock faces and hillsides make it one of the most stunning arid landscapes on earth. At 2,400m, the town is set at the foot of the aptly named Hill of the Seven Colours, and has a church consecrated in 1648, which you will see on your tour of the village, along with the handicraft market. Later, stop in Tilcara and visit an archaeological museum and the ruins of Pucara. Continue through other delightful villages before arriving at picturesque Humahuaca. There is plenty of free time to enjoy its narrow cobbled streets and adobe colonial buildings, before driving back to Purmamarca.

DAY 6

Enter the Puna: drive to Tolar Grande.

Climb a winding road into the high Andes, the increasingly arid and empty landscape becoming ever more bleakly beautiful. You reach the rim of Salinas Grandes, a vast, flat and gleaming-white pan of natural salt, which is still mined today.Continue to the remote village San Antonio de los Cobres. The otherwise stripped-bare landscape is relieved by a few wind-torn areas of tufty grass, clinging to life on a dusty plain, hemmed in by the exposed ribs of naked, ochre mountains. The road then climbs through barren hills and past lonely churches to the highest point on today's journey at 4,500m. Here, you'll begin to spot tiny ghost villages and halts associated with an abandoned railway line.

Rise to a flat plain via a gorge between conical, deeply rust-red hills, Los Colorados, and cross the uncompromising Desierto del Diablo (Devil's Desert), populated only by flocks of vicuñas, to the modest hamlet Tolar Grande, 3,500m, where you spend two nights in a modest but cosy guest house.

Today's drive on gravel roads will take 6-8 hours or longer – as on the other days, you will be tempted to step out of the vehicle at the many scenic spots along the way.

DAY 7

Explore the Puna from Tolar Grande.

There are two options for today. The first takes you to the abandoned settlements and ghost mines which stud the desert, dwarfed by the off-the-scale grandeur of the natural environment. These include Caipe, a haunting abandoned railway settlement and a very atmospheric place – a forlorn, rusting locomotive on the track, piles of sulphur, discarded railway timetables dating back to the 1970s in the former ticket office. Further on, beyond salt flats with sweeping views of a bowl of rose-hued mountains is Mina la Casualidad (4,100m) where deserted houses, a church, a shop and a school playground are all overshadowed by the gigantic rusting hulks of the mine's crumbling infrastructure. After a picnic lunch you may climb even higher to Mina Julia at a chilly 5,200m: it may be snowed in, but the snow-blanched scenery alone is worth the effort to get there.

The second, less ambitious option takes you first to the Ojos de Mar, close to Tolar Grande. These salt-encrusted circular freshwater pools, a splash of gemstone turquoise with a tawny backdrop, are a stunning sight in the sunlight of dawn or dusk when the mountains are reflected on the surface.

DAY 8

Further explorations of the Puna en route to El Peñon.

Set off towards across the salt pan towards the Cono de Arita, a symmetrical black basalt cone rising out of the white salt desert. It's 110m high and so perfect in form that it looks man-made, and is admired by New Agers for it magical properties. The gravel track continues with multi-faceted views of the cono and rainbow-hued hills rich with minerals and tiny plants. You may spot small herds of vicuña and donkeys along the way.

Arriving at the Salar de Antofalla, the largest salt lake in Argentina, the road descends into the white oblivion of the salt-flats, continuing across rock-strewn desert. Arrive at Antofalla (pop. 40), an ancient oasis village where centuries-old adobe dwellings line the dusty streets leading to an exquisite white church. The road begins to climb steeply towards today's highest point, 4,600m, where farmed llamas graze on a high plateau of golden tufty grass. The descent begins towards the settlement Antofagasta de la Sierra, set on a vast plain of around 200 black basalt volcanic cones.

You may spend the night at the basic hotel here or continue to El Peñon. (3,400m, pop 300) another quiet settlement with traditional adobe houses, a small plaza, and welcome splashes of green thanks to the poplar trees that are a feature of the small villages in this province.

DAY 9

Explore the unique, pearl-white pumice fields.

Today you discover one of the Puna's most unique, surreal and breath-taking highlights: the dazzling Campo de Piedra Pomez (pumice stone field). Arrive first at towering snow-white dunes where you can relax or hike on the untrodden rippling sand, climbing along the ridge which shimmers against a cobalt blue desert sky. The views across the desert plateau towards the contorted rock of the luminous pumice field and pitch-black lava rocks are astounding. On a clear day you can picnic here.

Continue to the vast pumice fields themselves and wander through the silent canyons and wind-eroded crevasses. Later in the afternoon (Oct-Apr only) you can drive on to the Laguna Grande (3,500m), home to one of the world's largest populations of James flamingos. It's an extraordinary sight. Return to El Peñon.

DAY 10

Leave the Puna and descend to Cafayate.

Today your ultimate destination is the agreeable town of Cafayate, centre of a thriving wine region. Arriving here is a pleasant way to reintegrate into the modern world.

Leaving the Puna behind, you'll travel up to the last high altitude pass (4,000m), with views over the pumice field and flocks of vicuña – one of just a few sightings of animals on the trip, save for domesticated creatures in the villages. From here it's downhill for over 2km of elevation, descending through canyons and gorges. The temperature rises and the rugged scenery is speckled with giant cacti and framed by multi-coloured mineral-infused mountains. Pass through small communities and then, below 2,000m, vineyards will start to appear.

Visit the 18th century church at Hualfin, the first major wine-producing town in the valley. You may also have the chance to visit Quilmes pre-Columbian archaeological site, which tells the story of the expulsion by the Spanish of the Quilmes people and their enslavement in Buenos Aires. Some residences and temples have been reconstructed on this large site, located at the foot of steep cliffs.

Enter the Calchaquies Valleys and continue to Cafayate, passing some pretty villages with colonial-era houses. Upon arrival at your hotel in Cafayate, you'll say goodbye to your driver/guide and trusty 4WD vehicle.

DAY 11

At leisure in Cafayate.

Your relaxing hotel, a few kilometres outside town, is a touch of luxury after the simple austerity of the Puna, surrounded by vineyards and with well-tailored gardens and a pool.

Frequently sun-drenched Cafayate, 1,700m, is a focal point of the winelands of the scenic Calchaquíes Valley. It has some first class eateries and a thriving arts and handicrafts scene and is a pleasant place to wander around.

The surrounding bodegas produce some excellent reds, the town is best known for its torrontés, an aromatic dry white wine. Many wineries welcome visitors with tasting sessions; you can take a taxi to visit one, or even walk.

DAY 12

Return to Salta airport via Las Conchas Canyon, fly to Buenos Aires.

You'll be met by another driver for the (paved) journey back to Salta. You might have thought the grand scenery was over, but this journey in itself is remarkably beautiful You travel through the blood-orange Las Conchas canyon, which is characterised by weird rock formations, with evocative names such as the 3 crosses, the amphitheatre and the Devil's throat. You are heading for the airport and depending on the time of your flight there may be time to stop and investigate these further, and maybe make a quick visit to the community Alemania, an old railway halt with a station which has been spruced up as café. In the 1920 some of the workers on the railroad who lived here came from Germany, hence the name. There were several hundred inhabitants until the railway closed, now only a few families remain but it is an evocative place.

Arrive at the airport and fly to Buenos Aires. Overnight in the city.

DAY 13

Transfer to the airport for international flight.

If your flight is in the evening, you might visit the refurbished port area at Puerto Madero. It is within walking distance of the centre and has a pleasant promenade and some good restaurants for lunch. Alternatively, hop in a taxi to colourful Italian La Boca, famous for its street artists.

WHAT'S INCLUDED IN THE PRICE

Services of our team of experts in our London office

Services of Journey Latin America local representatives and guides

All land and air transport within Latin America

Accommodation as specified

Meals as specified

Excursions as specified, including entrance fees

INCLUDED EXCURSIONS

Guided walking tour in Buenos Aires

Guided walking tour of Salta

Full day exploration of the Humahuaca gorge

Excursions on the Puna expedition

Optional Quilmes archaeological site (entrance fee not included, you pay at the gate)

WHAT'S NOT INCLUDED IN THE PRICE

Tips and gratuities

Meals other than specified

International flights to Latin America

Airport taxes, when not included in the ticket

Optional excursions

ESSENTIALS

ALTITUDE
A small minority of visitors may suffer temporarily from altitude sickness. Symptoms vary; most common are mild headaches, slight nausea and breathlessness. You need to take things easy on the first day travelling from Purmamarca to Tolar Grande and resist the temptation to jump out of the vehicle every 5 minutes to take pictures. The conventional advice is to avoid drinking alcohol and eat sparingly the first day over 3,000m, fortunately meals on this trip are not overly rich.

TRANSPORT
Domestic flights are by scheduled jet. The vehicle used from Salta to Purmamarca and up into the Puna is a Toyota Hilux or similar, a 4WD pick-up which can accommodate 4 guests and a driver but we recommend that three is the maximum number for a comfortable trip. For other (paved) roads and transfers, normal 2WD cars are used.

ACCOMMODATION
Accommodation in the Puna is simple, the two small inns in Tolar Grande and El Peñon are cosy and comfortable considering their remoteness. Occasionally it may be necessary to use alternative, very basic accommodation. Food is simple throughout the Puna region. In Buenos Aires, Salta and Cafayate accommodation is in mid-range or upper-mid range hotels.

MEALS
Breakfast daily, lunch day 5, 10, full board days 6-9.

GUIDES
We carefully select our local partners, some of whom we have worked with for over 25 years. Their English-speaking guides understand the expectations of our clients very well, and are consistently singled out for praise by the latter on their return.

Your experienced, qualified driver-guide on the Puna expedition is also a great source of information relating to the history, geology and geography of the area. There are only a small handful of guides equipped to take on this expedition with visitors.

SUMMARY OF NIGHTS
13 days, 12 nights: Buenos Aires 2; Salta 2; Purmamarca 1; Tolar Grande 2; El Penon 2; Cafayate 2; Buenos Aires 1.

BUDGET
The Puna expedition is full board, on days 6-9 your only living expenses should be drinks. Elsewhere, a budget of around US$50-70 per day should cover the cost of meals not included in the holiday itinerary, drinks and the odd souvenir. Eat at the best restaurants in cities and you will pay considerably more.

CURRENCY
The unit of currency in Argentina is the Argentine peso.

HOW TO TAKE IT
For our latest currency advice for Argentina please see our FAQs section.

TIPPING
Tips are expected and local guides often rely on their tip as a significant proportion of their income.

Most service industry workers will expect a tip of some kind and so it is useful to have spare change for hotel porters, taxi drivers and the like. It is common to leave 10 – 12% in restaurants.

Your driver-guide on the Puna expedition is also a great source of information relating to the history, geology and geography of the area. There are only a handful of suitably qualified driver/guides sufficiently competent and experienced

to undertake this journey and you will no doubt take this into account when you come to showing your appreciation at the end of the trip.

INSURANCE AND DOCUMENTS

Travel insurance is essential.
Details of our recommended policy can be found on our Travel Insurance page.

AIRPORT TAXES

If you have purchased your flights through Journey Latin America, the international departure tax is usually included in the ticket.

TRIP SUITABILITY

This holiday incorporates is an expedition in the true meaning of the word. You are setting off into a virtually uninhabited wilderness with unmade roads and little or no infrastructure. This is one of South America's epic road journeys. You will be travelling with an experienced English-speaking guide, well acquainted with the conditions and the route, and able to entertain you with anecdotes and acquaint you with the region's history, geography and geology.

Owing to the unpredictability of the conditions, or bearing in mind your preferences, the itinerary is for guidance only, and changes may have to be made without notice. The expeditionary nature of this journey is part of its appeal, and a flexible attitude will help you fully to enjoy the experience.

Travel here is far from monotonous – the views change frequently and there's almost no-one else around. Without mobile phone or internet access, you feel an exhilarating sense of isolation from the outside world. You'll spend four full days exploring the Puna, travelling for several hours a day (with many stops for views, photos, and strolls).

Altitude combined with remoteness, lack of medical facilities and simple accommodation makes the Puna suitable for resilient travellers. The start point Salta is 1,200m and end point Cafayate 1,650m. However, almost all travel in-between is at altitudes of 3,000m – 4,500m. Sleeping altitude in Tolar Grande, Antofagasta de la Sierra and El Peñon is 3,500m.

CLIMATE

In Buenos Aires, October to November and March to April see temperatures between 15 and 25°C and a good deal of sunshine. January to February is hot, with temperatures over 30°C. Winter (June-August) sees daytime temperatures dip to 10-12°C.

Salta has plenty of sun throughout the year but it can be cool in winter, but it is drier with little rain falling Apr-Oct. Jan-Feb is the wettest period.

Much of the journey will be at altitudes of over 4,000m; the climate is equally extreme. There are sharp differences in temperature between night-and day-time, sun and cloud. Very cold nights are most likely in the height of the dry season (July-August) with sub-zero temperatures, but days can still be mild and sunny. The Puna can be visited year round but there are rare occasions when extreme weather can cause disruption due to floods or snow. This is mostly in the peak of the Andean summer rains (January-March) and the middle of winter (July-August). The best time to visit overall is September to December and April to June.

CLOTHING AND SPECIAL EQUIPMENT

In the southern hemisphere summer (Dec-Mar) it will be hot in both the cities – Buenos Aires and Salta – and the countryside, so take loose-fitting light clothing for maximum comfort.

If you plan to go to good restaurants or out on evening entertainment trips, you might bring something a bit smarter as well (although formal attire will not be required).

With regular changes in altitude and weather coming from the Andes, you need to come prepared for all seasons at all times of the year. In the Puna you may experience anything from a day of snow flurries and bitterly cold gale-force winds and a spectacular still day of warm sunshine in the low 20s. Nights are always cold with sub-zero temperatures possible. Layers are essential – a thermal long sleeved base layer won't go amiss – in any case bring a warm jacket, hat, gloves. Sunscreen and sunglasses are essential.

Please get in touch with the office before departure if you have any doubts.

VACCINATIONS

Preventative vaccinations are recommended against the following: polio; tetanus; typhoid. For specific requirements you must consult your GP.

You can also find helpful information on the Masta Travel Health website.

VISAS

Holders of a full British passport do not require a visa, although passports must be valid for at least 6 months after the trip begins. Anyone with a different nationality should enquire with us or check with the relevant consulate.

If flying to the US, or via the US you will need to fill in your online ESTA application.

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GET IN TOUCH WITH US...

Our friendly, knowledgeable team of travel experts are always happy to chat about holiday ideas and share helpful advice. Give us a call today and begin planning your perfect trip to Latin America.

GIVE US A CALL

We'd love to chat

0208 747 8315

OPENING HOURS

Monday – Friday: 9am – 6pm
Saturday & Sunday: Closed

SEND US AN EMAIL

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