

WILDLIFE TRAVEL



NEW ITINERARY
FOR 2019

24th September to 11th October 2019 (18 days)

CENTRAL CHILE & ATACAMA

Wild flowers, wildlife, wine and astronomy

Chile has been one of our favourite destinations since we first visited in 2004. This year we are heading back up along the north coast and to the Atacama desert, in search of wild flowers, while also visiting some of the astronomical observatories and fine wineries that Chile is famous for.

From Santiago, we will travel through the Mediterranean regions of Central Chile, enjoying some of the country's finest **wineries** along the way, to the spectacular coastline, where we will explore the unique 'lomas' vegetation, rich in bulbs, cacti and other endemic plants.

The **Atacama Desert** has some of the most unusual and attractive landscapes on the planet, full of salt pans, geysers and 'lunar landscapes'. It is by far the **driest place on Earth**, a sparsely populated plateau, extending from the coast of the Pacific to the high altiplano. Although the average width of the Atacama is less than 100 miles, it extends more than 600 miles south from the Peruvian border. To the east this barren landscape changes abruptly as it rises through the foothills of the Andes and becomes the impressive altiplano, with its alluvial salt basins (salars), **snow-capped volcanoes** and a surprising variety of wildlife, including three species of flamingo.

The dry, pollution-free atmosphere and high altitude makes this the perfect location for some of the world's most important **astronomical observatories**, and we will visit of two of these cutting-edge scientific facilities.

As well as the endemic plants, we will find a variety of birds and butterflies, reptiles and mammals along the way, from penguins and hummingbirds to herds of Vicuna and the characterful Vizcacha.



Price
£6,595

Single Room Supplement
£750

Full board

- Day 1** depart UK
- Day 2** arrive Santiago
Concha y Toro
- Day 3** El Paral, Olmue
- Day 4** La Campana NP
- Day 5** Los Molles
- Day 6** Bosque Fray Jorge
- Day 7** Coquimbo, Huasco
- Day 8-9** Llanos de Challe
- Day 10** Pan de Azucar NP
- Day 11** Paposo
- Day 12** Paranal observatory
- Day 13** ALMA observatory
- Day 14** Los Flamencos
- Day 15** El Tatio geysers
- Day 16** flight to Santiago
- Day 17/18** return to UK

Leaders
Philip Precey
with local guides

Wildlife and culture holidays



Our profits are donated to the **Wildlife Trusts**



FOCUS OF INTEREST

The itineraries for our 'mainly wild flowers' holidays are mainly based around plants but there may also be visits to certain areas for birds and general wildlife. There is the opportunity to enjoy the birds and general wildlife in each location, as well as the culture of the areas visited.



ITINERARY

Please note that we may change the itinerary to suit local weather and road conditions or for other practical reasons, at the leader and guide's discretion

Day 1, Tue 24th Sept An afternoon flight takes us from London to Paris and then on to Santiago in central Chile, arriving **Day 2 Wed 25th Sept** From the airport, we will visit a nearby wetland for our first introduction to the birdlife of Chile. After lunch, we will visit the famous **Viña Concha y Toro**, located in the Maipo Valley. This winery is one of the oldest and largest operations in Chile: we will learn about the famed Carmenere and Cabernet Sauvignons that they produce, and visit the famous 'Casillero del Diablo', the Devil's Cellar that has given its name to one of their most familiar wine: this impressive underground cellar is where the landlord used to hide his best wines, telling his employees that the Devil himself dwelled in this dark and mysterious place. o/n Santiago.

Day 3, Thu 26th Sept Leaving Santiago behind, we drive west and then north through the Central Valley to Olmue, in the coastal ranges. This central area of Chile is one of only five regions in the world with a **Mediterranean** climate, its natural vegetation being matorral (the Chilean equivalent of maquis) and dry woodlands.

We will drive via the wetlands of the El Paral Nature Reserve, home to Coypu and birds such as Many-coloured Rush Tyrant, Stripe-backed Bittern and Black-headed Duck. Our charming hotel is set in attractive gardens in this pleasant, fruit-growing town. o/n Olmue.

Day 4, Fri 27th Sept Today we explore **La Campana National Park (Unesco World Biosphere Reserve)**, set in a beautiful valley, once visited by Darwin, where we will visit one of the last remaining groves of the magnificent Chilean Palm *Jubaea chilensis*. We will visit an area full of tall cacti and other spectacular



plants such as *Puya* (bromeliads), where amongst the wonderful vegetation we will look for an array of fantastically-named birds endemic to Chile: Moustached Turca, White-throated Tapaculo, and Dusky-tailed Canastero. Lizards and small mammals such as Degu may also be seen.

Later in the afternoon, we will visit a winery in the Casablanca Valley, one of Chile's finest wine producing areas. o/n Olmue.

Day 5, Sat 28th Sept Today we head further north, heading to **Los Molles**, on the coast to the north. Here we should see a marvellous selection of plants including many endemics such as orchids, bulbs and striking ***Alstroemeria*** species, as well as the endangered *Puya venusta*.

Nearby we will visit the coast near Cachagua, where we will look for Humboldt Penguins at their breeding colony, the spectacular Inca Terns and (if we are lucky) the endearing Marine Otter, the world's smallest otter that lives along these rocky coasts. o/n Ovalle.

Day 6, Sun 29th Sept This morning we visit the **Bosque Fray Jorge National Park**, which protects the northernmost area of Valdivian temperate rainforest, a post-glacial relict that survives here, watered by the coastal fogs which hang on the mountain slopes. The National Park is bordered to the south by the Limari river, and in the afternoon we will venture into the Limari Valley to visit one of the area's wineries. o/n Ovalle.

Day 7, Mon 30th Sept. A travel day: today we continue our journey northwards, covering more than 300km on our way to Huasco. We will stop on the way to visit the markets at Coquimbo and La Serena. o/n Huasco.

Day 8-9, Tue 1st/Wed 2nd Oct We will spend two days in and around the **Llanos de Challe National Park** and the nearby Quebrada El Leon. This is a wonderful and seldomly-visited reserve where the vegetation survives on the coastal fog that regularly blows in off the cold Humboldt current. The Park protects an amazing diversity of plantlife, particularly cacti and other succulents.

Photos: (page 2, left to right) Llanos de Challe National Park and Humboldt Penguin (both FSE) (page 3, from top) *Rhodophiala advena*, Chilean Palms and Moustached Turca (WT)



If the winter rains were enough to trigger the blooming, this park becomes one of the hotspots to see the myriad of *Nolana*, *Cistanthe* and many other plants belonging to the 'lomas' vegetation, a plant community only found along the coastal deserts of Peru and northern Chile. One of the highlights of the area may be one of the most charismatic flowers of the '**blooming desert**', the beautiful **Garra de León**, *Bomarea (Leontochir) ovallei*, a relative of the *Alstroemerias* which grows in specific gullies along the coast. We will see large stands of *Copiapoa dealbata* which grow sometimes in exaggerated and oversized clumps. The sandy terrain sustains many bulbs, perennials and annuals including *Rhodophiala bagnoldi*, *Alstroemeria chrysantha* and *Argylia radiata*. Birds could include Andean Condor and we will keep our eyes open for various lizard species, including the chunky, agama-like Chilean Iguana. o/n Bahía Inglesa.

Day 10, Thu 3rd Oct Continuing northwards, today we visit **Pan de Azúcar National Park**, another fog oasis located immediately by the deep blue waters of the Pacific. This protected area is characterized by its iconic desert landscapes, with more than 200 flowering plant species, including a large number of cactus species: impressive aggregations of ***Copiapoa cinerascens*** and the striking *Copiapoa columna-alba* are present in the park, while Chilla Fox and Guanaco, the wild ancestor of the llama, are often seen on the rocky hillsides. The day will give us plenty of wonderful photographic opportunities. o/n Taltal.

Day 11, Fri 4th Oct A little way north of Taltal, we will spend today exploring another area of 'lomas' vegetation, the nature reserve at **Paposo**. Large stands of the columnar cactus *Eulychnia iquiquensis* and the bromeliad *Deuterochonia chrysantha*, along with various species of *Eriosyce*, *Copiapoa*, *Alstroemeria* and *Schizanthus* will all provide plenty to entertain the plant enthusiasts. Interesting birds may include White-throated Tapaculo and Oasis Hummingbirds. o/n Taltal.

Day 12, Sat 5th Oct Today we will visit the European Southern Observatory at Paranal. Since 1962, the observatories have taken advantage of the high altitude and clear skies of the Atacama desert to provide state-of-the-art research facilities to astronomers and astrophysicists from around the world. Our guided visit will give us an insight into the science carried out here. o/n Calama.



Day 13, Sun 6th Oct A second day of astronomical exploration, today we will visit ALMA, the Atacama Large Millimeter Array of radio telescopes, first opened in 2011.

Of course, we will never be far from Chile's wonderful wildlife, and we will no doubt make a stop or two on the way, to enjoy the high altitude plants and animals. o/n Calama

Day 14, Mon 7th Oct Back to the wildlife: we will spend today in the **Los Flamencos National Reserve**, visiting Salar de Atacama and Chaxa Lake, where the water originates in geyser fields and from melting snow and ice in the highlands. Salts are concentrated and precipitate, and the water becomes pink, blue or white, through colonization by saline tolerant bacteria and diatoms. During the afternoon we will visit the impressive Lagunas Miscanti & Miñiques which hold one of the few breeding populations of the scarce Horned Coot. Three species of flamingo may be found in the area, along with several high altitude bird species, and we might see herds of Vicuñas or the large Culpeo Fox around the lakes against the magnificent mountain backdrop. o/n San Pedro de Atacama

Day 15, Tue 8th Oct We explore the impressive **El Tatio Geysers**, one of the highest geyser fields in the world and a bizarre landscape filled with columns of steam, covered by cones of crystallized silica and other salts, and containing ponds of boiling pastel-coloured mud. Surprisingly, some plants and animals are adapted to live in these extreme environments. o/n San Pedro de Atacama

Day 16, Wed 9th Oct Alas we must bid farewell to the Atacama, driving to Calama in time for our flights back to Santiago for one last night at an airport hotel, before our morning flights next day (**Day 17 Thu 10th Oct**) arriving back in the UK **Day 18, Fri 11th Oct**.

Photos (page 4) *Copiapoa cinerascens* (WT) & Guanaco (FSE) (page 5, from top) *Alstroemeria magnifica* (FSE), ALMA observatory (Y Beletsky (LCO)/ESO, via flickr), *Rhodophiala sp* (FSE)



Accommodation, Meals & Transport

Accommodation will be at good lodges and hotels all with en-suite accommodation. Meals provided during the stay will be a mixture of local and International dishes. Requests for special diets can be accommodated.

We will ensure that our travelling is as comfortable as possible, using small coach/mini-bus. On the longer journeys we will be in a comfortable, air-conditioned coach and will make **plenty of comfort stops and have time to stretch our legs a little and explore** some of the places en route. The areas we pass through are fascinating and our journeys give us the chance to see much of the landscape and the local culture.

We will take a domestic flight between Calama and Santiago with Latam.

Leaders and guides

Our leader for this trip is **Philip Precey**. Philip is a Director of Wildlife Travel, a keen all round naturalist who leads many of our holidays and is never to be found far from his binoculars. This will be Philip's second visit to Chile. Whether it's cacti or bulbs, birds or butterflies, Philip's natural history knowledge will ensure you get the most from your trip. Our tour is being organised by our friends at **Far South Expeditions** who are based in Punta Arenas, Chile. Our local guide will be **Claudio Vidal**, one of Far South's founders. Claudio leads natural history tours throughout Chile, including our six previous trips to the country, and is also author of several (highly recommended) natural history books on Chile.

Weather

A range of weather is expected. In Santiago and the central parts of Chile, up along the coast to the north it is likely to be sunny and warm: it will be cooler at night, and we may find fog and damp conditions around the northern 'lomas'.

In the Atacama it will no doubt be dry(!), mostly warm during the day, but it can get cold at higher altitude, especially early in the morning and in the evenings.

Photos: (page 6) Quebrada El Leon (WT) and the flowering desert (FSE): (page 7, from top) *Astroemeria pelegrina* at Los Molles (WT), Andean Flamingo (FSE), Chilla Fox (WT) and the 'Devil's Cellar' at Concho y Toro (FSE)



Extending your holiday

Chile is one of our favourite destinations, and well worth spending more time in. You might like to extend your holiday to take in some of the other highlights of the country.

You might also consider travelling out to Chile a day or two earlier, to have some time to catch up and readjust to time zones after the long flight, and a more relaxed start to your trip

Health and Fitness

No strenuous walking is involved but you need to have a **reasonable level of general fitness**. Most of the walks are not long (perhaps a couple of hours): you will sometimes need to walk on **rough ground** or up hill.

We will be visiting **high altitudes** during our time in the Atacama. Taltal is at an altitude of 2000m, Calama is at 2,200m, and San Pedro is at c2,500m. We will be heading higher during our excursions: to 2,600m at Paranal, 2,900 at ALMA and then up to 4,100m at El Tatio and Los Flamencos. The gradual increase in altitude, from Taltal to Calama and then San Pedro will help us to acclimatise and the excursions for from San Pedro are optional. **If you have any reason to believe that you will be adversely affected at these altitudes you must consult your doctor prior to booking.**

General inoculations for travel are recommended. We do not visit malaria/yellow fever areas.



International Flights

Group flights are with AirFrance via Paris (CDG) as follows:

24th Sep dep London Heathrow 19.45, arr Paris 22.00
dep Paris 23.40, arr Santiago 08.15 (25th)
10th Oct dep Santiago 14.55, arr Paris 10.50 (11th)
11th Oct dep Paris 13.20, arr London Heathrow 13.45

Chile is 3 hours behind UK

It may be possible to fly from other regional airports, including Bristol and Manchester: ask us about options.

Passports and Visas

If you are a British passport holder visiting Chile for less than 90 days, you do not need a visa. Your passport should be valid for the proposed duration of your stay.

For holders of other passports please check with the relevant embassy.

Insurance

Personal travel insurance providing good medical cover, including emergency rescue and repatriation, is essential for this trip.



TO BOOK: Contact us to check availability and reserve a place. Then complete the Booking Form and send to Sunvil Holidays (CAA-ATOL Licence 808, ABTA V6218), our tour operator, with your deposit. All details about booking are given in the Booking Pack.

DEPOSIT PER PERSON £1,500, SECOND INSTALMENT ON CONFIRMATION OF HOLIDAY £1,500 (to cover committed costs) BALANCE DUE BY 25/6/2019

INCLUDED: Return flights from the UK, including airport taxes. Local transport as specified in itinerary including domestic flights within Chile. 15 night's accommodation (2 nights extra on overnight flights), full board basis (picnic lunches). Services of leader and local guide.

NOT INCLUDED: Drinks with evening meals, refreshments. Entrance fees during any optional sightseeing. Gratuities. Travel insurance.

WILDLIFE TRAVEL

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All photos courtesy Far South Expeditions (FSE) or Wildlife Travel (WT)

Front cover (clockwise from top): Inca Tern, *Alstroemeria pulchra*, Pan de Azucar (all WT) and *Bomarea ovallei* (FSE). Back: *Schizanthus hookeri* (WT) and Mountain Vizcacha (FSE)