



AN EPIC TREK IN CHILEAN PATAGONIA

The W Trek isn't only famous for its surreal, subpolar setting, tracing the shape of a W in the foothills of Chile's iconic Torres del Paine National Park. It's also known for the wild weather hikers inevitably encounter on the 80-kilometre route, which is typically completed in four or five days. Yet the unpredictability of Chilean Patagonia only deepens your connection to this savagely beautiful landscape, crowned by the distinctive jagged peaks of the Paine Massif (pictured). And even days of horizontal rain can proffer pleasant surprises – in my case, crossing paths with a wild puma, its damp tawny fur glistening in the silvery light.

Each campsite is anchored by a rustic *refugio* (hiking lodge), some with dorm beds and rooms. After happily

falling into a bed following the return slog to the national park's defining 'towers' on the first day, I opted to lighten my load by booking pre-pitched tents (with sleeping bag and mat) and all meals, a luxury sweetened by my discovery that the refugios don't only serve meals, but also pisco sours!

But you needn't camp to experience the magic of the W Trek, for a clutch of luxury eco lodges also run day hikes on sections of the trail. Among them is Tierra Patagonia (pictured above), perched above Lake Sarmiento. Dedicated to connecting guests with this wild corner of southern Chile in meaningful and sustainable ways, its ethos echoes that of its new partners – Australia's Baillie Lodges, which acquired a majority share in the Chilean boutique hotel group in 2022. tierrahotels.com; lastorres.com – Sarah Reid



PHOTOGRAPHY CRISTINA HARBOE T/COURTESY OF TIERRA PATAGONIA (TORRES DEL PAINE NATIONAL PARK)

A scenic flight over the South Pole

We're going beyond. Beyond the penguins and icebergs that cruisers see. Beyond a glimpse of its mountainous fringes that most scenic flights witness. We're going deep, all the way to the geographic South Pole. Only a tiny few have witnessed it and I'm on the world's first commercial scenic flyover from another continent, a 16-hour round-trip from Melbourne with Chimu Adventures (fully carbon-offset). Alongside me are the travellers who have been everywhere else.

Antarctica is big – Australia would fit comfortably inside it – and so surreal it might as well be another planet. From above, shifting plates of ice create vast mosaics, the Transantarctic Mountains stretch 3500 kilometres out of sight and Mt Erebus's snowy summit hides a volcanic lake. Sheer ice cliffs plunge vertically into blue water, epic glaciers flow between mountains and the Dry Valleys are charcoal-dark and devoid of snow, so cold and windy that any ice daring to creep in instantly vaporises.

It's a visual feast narrated by the pilots who share tales of Amundsen and Scott's race to the Pole, and by a few scientists and explorers who tell us what it's like down there.

The South Pole station is marked by a cluster of buildings, its famous ceremonial striped barber pole too small to see from 5200 metres. But our journey has given us enough to grasp the meaning of this place – its grandeur, importance and fragility. We have seen and we understand. chimuadventures.com – Laura Waters

