

South America Directory

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This directory provides general information on South America, from activities and books to toilets and telephones. Specific information for each country is listed in the Directory sections at the end of each country chapter.

ACCOMMODATIONS

Obviously there are many more places to stay in South America than we're able to include in this book, but we've sifted through most of the continent's accommodation options and included those we think are the best. Throughout the book's Sleeping sections, we list accommodations in order of price, with

the cheapest listed first. For those nights when the thought of another cold, shared shower and a hard, over-used bed is enough to make you toss in your pack, we've also included a few midrange options. And for a real treat, we've thrown in a few splurges – places where an extra US\$20 or so will get you a nurturing night in one of our favorite places to stay.

Accommodation costs vary greatly from country to country, with Andean countries (especially Bolivia) being the cheapest (from as little as US\$2 per night) and Chile, Brazil and the Guianas the costliest (more than US\$30).

Some excellent online resources have popped up recently, including the ingenious **CouchSurfing** (www.couchsurfing.com) and the reliable **Hostel World** (www.hostelworld.com).

Camping

Camping is an obvious choice in parks and reserves and a useful budget option in pricier countries such as Chile. In the Andean countries (Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru), there are few organized campgrounds. In Argentina, Chile, Uruguay and parts of Brazil, however, camping holidays have long been popular.

Bring all your own gear. While camping gear is available in large cities and in trekking and activities hubs, it's expensive and choices are usually minimal. Camping gear can be rented in areas with substantial camping and trekking action (eg the Lake District, Mendoza and Huaraz), but quality is sometimes dubious.

An alternative to tent-camping is staying in *refugios* (simple structures within parks and reserves), where a basic bunk and kitchen access are usually provided. For climbers, most summit attempts involve staying in a *refugio*.

BOOK ACCOMMODATION ONLINE

For more accommodation reviews and recommendations by Lonely Planet authors, check out the online booking service at www.lonelyplanet.com. You'll find the true, insider lowdown on the best places to stay. Reviews are thorough and independent. Best of all, you can book online.

Hostels

Albergues (hostels) have become increasingly popular throughout South America and, as throughout the world, are great places to socialize with other travelers. You'll rarely find an official *albergue juvenil* (youth hostel); most hostels accept all ages and are unaffiliated with Hostelling International (HI). Once known for their institutional atmosphere, HI facilities have become increasingly attractive as new owners tune in to the sophisticated tastes of budget travelers.

Hotels

When it comes to hotels, both terminology and criteria vary. The costliest in the genre are *hoteles* (hotels) proper. A step down in price are *hostales* (small hotels or, in Peru, guest-houses). The cheapest places are *hospedajes*, *casas de huéspedes*, *residenciales*, *alojamientos* and *pensiones*. A room in these places includes a bed with (hopefully) clean sheets and a blanket, maybe a table and chair and sometimes a fan, but rarely any heating. Showers and toilets are generally shared, and there may not be hot water. Cleanliness varies widely, but many places are remarkably tidy. In some areas, especially southern Chile, the cheapest places may be *casas familiares*, family houses whose hospitality makes them excellent value.

Some cheap hotels rent rooms by the hour. In big cities, rooms in 'love hotels' (called *albergues transitorios* or *telos*) are only available by the hour, but in smaller towns, the cheapest hotels may take hourly rate *and* overnight guests. It's usually pretty apparent what type of hotel you're in, and we try our hardest to list only those places where you'll get a decent night's sleep, sans the neighborly bump and grind.

In Brazil, Argentina and some other places, prices often include breakfast. Especially in Brazil, it's worth paying a little extra for a place with a quality breakfast.

Hot-water supplies are often erratic, or may be available only at certain hours of the day. It's something to ask about (and consider paying extra for), especially in the highlands and far south, where it gets *cold*.

When showering, beware the electric shower head, an innocent looking unit that heats cold water with an electric element. Don't touch the shower head or anything metal when the water is on, or you may get shocked – never strong enough to throw you

across the room, but hardly pleasant. Wearing rubber sandals protects you from shock. Regulate the temperature by adjusting the water flow: more water means less heat.

In Sleeping sections throughout this book, prices are given for rooms with shared and private bathrooms. If bathrooms are not mentioned in the price, assume that private bathrooms are the only option.

ACTIVITIES

Whether you take to the mountain, the water or into thin air, opportunities for outdoor fun abound in South America.

Cycling

Peddling South America (or parts of it) can prove an arduous undertaking, but the rewards are beyond anything the bus-bound can imagine. You can bomb down the 'World's Most Dangerous Road' (p193), scream down the flanks of an Ecuadorian volcano and dodge herds of sheep in Patagonia. While plenty of riders pull off a continental tour, a more realistic approach, unless you're flush with time and cash, is biting off a chunk. Popular routes include Chilean and Argentine Patagonia (though the constant northwest winds can be brutal); an Ecuador–Peru–Bolivia tour; cycling the length of the Andes from Quito, Ecuador to Ushuaia, Argentina (or vice-versa); or a spin around northern Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay and southern Brazil.

No matter where you end up riding, a mountain bike is the ideal machine, as the most scenic and uncongested roads are often dirt. Bring everything from home as equipment is hard to find outside major cities, and even then it can be painfully expensive.

If you're not bringing your bike, you'll find opportunities to rent for a day or join a mountain-biking tour. Usually, however, equipment is nothing like you're used to back home. Online, check out **South American Bicycle Touring Links** (www.geocities.com/TheTropics/Island/6810) for a long list of touring links. The **Warm Showers List** (www.warmshowers.org) is a list of cyclists around the world who offer long-haulers a free place to crash.

Hiking & Trekking

South America is a brilliant hiking and trekking destination. Walking in the Andean countries is not limited to the national parks: because the network of dirt roads is so exten-

sive, you can pretty much walk anywhere, and with the region's indigenous population often doing the same, you won't be alone.

The Andean countries are famous for their old Inca roads, which are ready-made for scenic excursions. The over-trodden, three-day tramp along the Inca Trail to Machu Picchu (p884) is, of course, the classic, but alternate routes are more highly recommended because they are cheaper, less touristed, more scenic and less destructive. See p888 for some alternatives. There are other treks along Inca trails as well, including Ecuador's lesser-known Inca trail to Ingapirca (p693) and numerous along ancient Inca routes through Bolivia's Cordillera Real (p203) to the Yungas.

The national parks of southern South America, including Chile's Torres del Paine (p524), those within the Argentine Lake District (p130), and even Argentina's storm-pounded but spectacular Fitz Roy range (p152), are superb and blessed with excellent trail infrastructure and accessibility.

Lesser-known mountain ranges, such as Colombia's Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta (principally to Ciudad Perdida; p581), and Venezuela's Sierra Nevada de Mérida (p1016), also have great potential. The two- to three-day hike to the top of Venezuela's Roraima (p1042) is one of the continent's most unforgettable experiences.

When trekking in the Andes, especially the high parks and regions of Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru, altitude sickness is a very real danger; for more information, see p1095. Elevations in the southern Andes are much lower. Most capital cities have an Instituto Geográfico Militar, which is usually the best place for official topographical maps.

Diving

Major destinations for divers are the Caribbean coast of Colombia and Venezuela, islands such as Providencia (a Colombian island that is actually nearer to Nicaragua; p594) and the Galápagos (p724), and Brazil's Arraial do Cabo (p300).

Mountaineering

On a continent with one of the world's greatest mountain ranges, climbing opportunities are almost unlimited. Ecuador's volcanoes, the high peaks of Peru's Cordillera Blanca (p913) and Cordillera Huayhuash (p920), Bolivia's Cordillera Real (p201) and Argentina's

Aconcagua (the western hemisphere's highest peak; p127) all offer outstanding mountaineering opportunities. Despite its relatively low elevation, Argentina's Fitz Roy range (p152) – home to Cerro Torre, one of the world's most challenging peaks – chalks in as one of the world's top five climbing destinations.

River Rafting

Chile churns with good white water: the Maipó (p433), Trancura (p485) and Futaleufú (p512) rivers are all world class. River running is also possible on the scenic Río Urubamba (p881) and other rivers near Cuzco, the Río Cañete (p845) south of Lima, and in the canyon country around Arequipa (p861), in Peru. In Argentina, several rivers around Bariloche (p136) and Mendoza (p122) are worth getting wet in. Baños (p680) and especially Tena (p702) in Ecuador are both rafting hubs. The 2005 International Rafting Federation's World Rafting Championship was held on Ecuador's mighty Río Quijos.

Skiing & Snowboarding

South America's most important downhill ski areas are in Chile and Argentina – see those chapters for more details. The season is roughly June to September. There's also plenty of snow in the Andes of Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia and Venezuela, where ski touring is a challenging possibility. More than one *loco* snowboarder has been known to bomb down an Andean volcano after climbing it. Chris Lizza's *South America Ski Guide* is an excellent resource.

Surfing

South America's best surfing is in Peru, especially the northern coast, but the water's chilly (so bring a wetsuit). Chile's central and northern coasts get good waves too, making a jaunt down South America's west coast, starting in Ecuador, satisfying indeed. Brazil has thousands of kilometers of coast, mostly characterized by beach breaks, with the best breaks in the southeast. Uruguay and Venezuela both have decent surf with a handful of top-notch waves. For more far-flung possibilities there's the Galápagos Islands (p724) and Rapa Nui (Easter Island; p530).

For detailed information, get a copy of the *Surf Report* from **Surfer Publications** (☎ 949-661-5147; www.surfermag.com; PO Box 1028, Dana Point, CA 92629, USA). It has individual reports on most parts of

the South American coast. On the web, check out **Wannasurf** (www.wannasurf.com). For forecasts, subscribe to **Surflin** (www.surflin.com).

Wind Sports

Windsurfing and kite-surfing are becoming hugely popular and you might be able to learn how to do both (if you don't already know) more cheaply than at home. Adícora (p1008) and Isla Margarita (p1034) in Venezuela, San Andrés, Colombia (p591) and numerous places along Brazil's northeast coast – especially Jericoacoara (p371) and Canoa Quebrada (p368) – are outstanding kitesurfing and windsurfing destinations. In Argentina, San Juan province's Cuesta del Viento reservoir (ask about it at the San Juan tourist office, p127) is one of the best wind-sport destinations in the world.

Paragliding and hang-gliding are also approached with extreme enthusiasm. Top destinations include Iquique, Chile (p459), Mérida, Venezuela (p1011) and Medellín, Colombia (p595) and you can even fly from urban locations like Miraflores in Lima (p838) and Pedra Bonita in Rio de Janeiro (p287).

BOOKS

The list of South America-related books varies as wildly as the continent itself. For country-specific books, see the Books section of each chapter Directory.

Art & Literature

Get a handle on the region's art history with *A Cultural History of Latin America: Literature, Music and the Visual Arts in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, edited by Leslie Bethell. Andean art is supremely discussed, illustrated and photographed in Rebecca Stone-Miller's lush volume *Art of the Andes*. Celluloid enthusiasts will want to see John King's seminal *Magical Reels: A History of Cinema in Latin America*.

For notable literature by South American authors, see the Arts section within individual country chapters.

Flora & Fauna

Tropical Nature, by Adrian Forsyth and Ken Miyata, is a wonderfully readable (and occasionally hilarious) introduction to neotropical rainforest ecology. You can dive deeper into tropical ecosystems with John Kricher's friendly *A Neotropical Companion*. *Neotropical Rainforest Mammals: A Field Guide*, by

Louise Emmons and François Feer, provides color illustrations for identification. All three of these are great to have along.

Bird-watchers heading to the Amazon should check out *South American Birds: A Photographic Aid to Identification* by John S Dunning. Covering more territory is Rodolphe Meyer de Schauensee's *A Guide to the Birds of South America*. Martin de la Peña's *Birds of Southern South America and Antarctica* is an excellent resource for southern Bolivia and Brazil, as well as points south.

The superb *Ecotravellers' Wildlife Guides* will tell you everything you need to know about wildlife, ecotourism, and threats and conservation efforts in specific habitats. Currently available in the series are *Ecuador and the Galápagos Islands*, *Brazil: Amazon & Pantanal* and *Peru*, all by David Pearson and Les Beletsky.

Henry Walter Bates' *The Naturalist on the River Amazons* is a classic 19th-century account. More or less contemporaneous is Alfred R Wallace's *A Narrative of Travels on the Amazon and Rio Negro*. Anthony Smith's *Explorers of the Amazon* is a series of essays on explorers of various kinds, from conquerors and scientists to plant collectors and rubber barons.

Perhaps the best overall account of the plight of the world's rainforests is journalist Catherine Caufield's *In the Rainforest*, which contains substantial material on Amazonia, but also covers other imperiled areas. Julie Sloan Denslow and Christine Padoch's *People of the Tropical Rainforest* is a well-illustrated collection of articles on tropical ecology and development that deals with rainforest immigrants and indigenous peoples.

An engaging combination of travelogue and botanical guide, *Tales of a Shaman's Apprentice* is the wonderful story of Mark Plotkin's travels in Amazonia and the Guianas in search of medicinal plants. For everything you ever wanted to know about flora in the Amazon region, see *A Field Guide to Medicinal and Useful Plants of the Upper Amazon* by James L Castner et al.

Guidebooks

William Leitch's beautifully written *South America's National Parks* is essential background for trekkers, superb on environment and natural history, but weaker on practical matters.

To glimpse day-to-day realities you'll likely face in your travels, check out the *Culture Shock!* series. The *In Focus* series offers succinct and solid country overviews. Both of these cover most South American countries.

History & Contemporary Issues

Open Veins of Latin America, a must-read by the renowned Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano, is a classic and eloquent polemic on the continent's cultural, social and political struggles. Galeano's *Memories of Fire* trilogy is also excellent. John A Crow's *The Epic of Latin America* is a daunting but accessible volume that covers Mexico to Tierra del Fuego, from prehistory to the present. George Pendle's *A History of Latin America* is a readable but very general account of the region since the European invasions.

Conquest of the Incas, by John Hemming, is one of the finest interpretations of the clash between the Spaniards and the Inca. Hemming's *Search for El Dorado* is an equally readable and illustrated account of the European quest for South American gold.

Carl O Sauer's *The Early Spanish Main* casts Columbus as an audacious bumbler whose greed colored his every perception of the New World.

For a general analysis of both the cocaine and anticocaine industries, read *Snowfields: The War on Cocaine in the Andes* by Clare Hargreaves. *Green Guerrillas: Environmental Conflicts and Initiatives in Latin America and the Caribbean*, edited by Helen Collinson, focuses on the struggle between environmental conservation and the survival of local communities, with many voices and alternative views presented throughout. For an overview of social problems in Latin America, see Eric Wolf and Edward Hansen's *The Human Condition in Latin America*.

Lonely Planet

It's impossible to cover every element of South American travel in this book, so if you want greater detail on specific places, consider supplementing it with other guides.

Lonely Planet produces regularly updated travel guides for individual South American countries, with heaps of information, numerous maps and color photos. Titles include *Argentina*; *Bolivia*; *Brazil*; *Chile & Easter Island*; *Colombia*; *Ecuador & the Galápagos Islands*; *Peru*; and *Venezuela*.

For even more detailed information, see the Lonely Planet city guides to *Buenos Aires* and *Rio de Janeiro*.

Also useful are the *Brazilian phrasebook*, the *Latin American Spanish phrasebook* and the *Quechua phrasebook*.

For detailed trekking information, look at Lonely Planet's *Trekking in the Patagonian Andes* and *Trekking in the Central Andes*. If you're planning to visit Central America as well as South America, get a copy of Lonely Planet's *Central America on a Shoestring*, which covers the region from Panama to Belize.

Travel Literature

Driving from Tierra del Fuego to the North Slope of Alaska in 23½ days takes a little extra something and Tim Cahill's got it in spades – hilarious run-ins with customs officials and other bureaucrats make his *Road Fever* a great read. Motorheads and *Comandante* buffs shouldn't miss *Chasing Che: A Motorcycle Journey in Search of the Guevara Legend*, by Patrick Symmes; it follows Che's journey through South America. Of course, you can go to the source by picking up a copy of *The Motorcycle Diaries*, by Ernesto Guevara himself.

Peter Matthiessen describes a journey from the rivers of Peru to the mountains of Tierra del Fuego in *The Cloud Forest*. Alex Shoumatoff's *In Southern Light* explores firsthand some of the fantastic legends of the Amazon.

Chilean writer Luis Sepúlveda's gripping personal odyssey takes him to different parts of the continent and beyond in *Full Circle: A South American Journey*, translated into English for Lonely Planet's travel literature series.

You'll find loads more travel lit recommendations in the Directory sections of individual country chapters.

BUSINESS HOURS

Generally, businesses are open from 8am or 9am to 8pm or 9pm Monday through Friday, with a nice, fat two- to three-hour lunch break around noon. Businesses are often open on Saturday, usually with shorter hours. Banks usually only change money Monday through Friday. Forget about getting anything done on Sunday, when nearly everything is closed. In the Andean countries, businesses tend to close earlier. More precise hours are given in the Business Hours section of each country's Directory. Business hours for individual establishments are provided only if they differ

significantly from these or those in the chapter directories. Opening hours for restaurants and bars vary throughout South America; see individual chapter directories for specifics.

CLIMATE

Climate in South America is a matter of latitude and altitude, although warm and cold ocean currents, trade winds and topography play their part. More than two-thirds of South America is tropical, including the Amazon Basin, northern Brazil, the Guianas and the west coasts of Colombia and Ecuador. These areas of tropical rainforest have average daily maximum temperatures of about 30°C (86°F) year-round and more than 2500mm of rain annually. Less humid tropical areas, such as the Brazilian highlands and the Orinoco Basin, are still hot but enjoy cool nights and a distinct dry season.

South of the Tropic of Capricorn, Paraguay and southern Brazil are humid subtropical zones, while much of Argentina, Chile and Uruguay have temperate mid-latitude climates with mild winters and warm summers ranging from 12°C (54°F) in July to 25°C (77°F) in January, depending on landforms and latitude. Rainfall, occurring mostly in winter, varies from 200mm to 2000mm annually, depending on winds and the rain-shadow effect of the Andes. (Most of the rain dumps on the Chilean side, while Argentina remains relatively dry, but receives strong winds.)

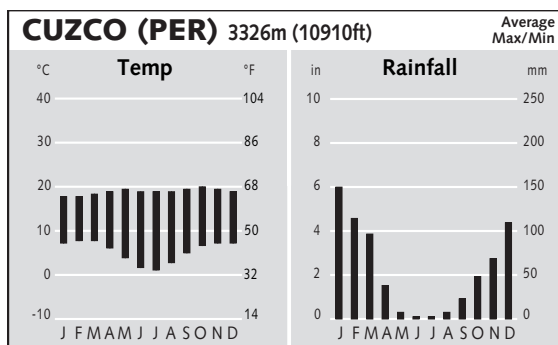
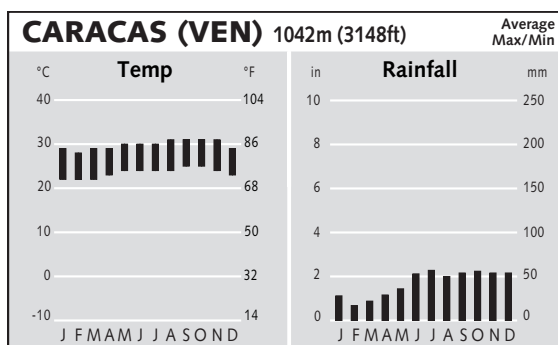
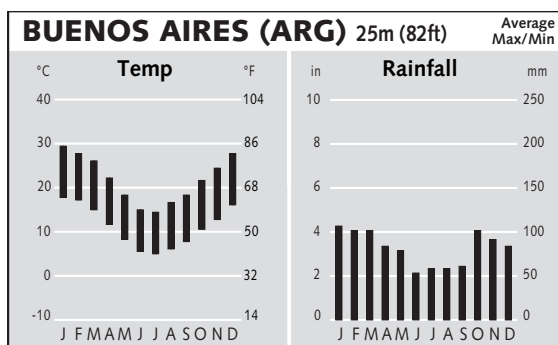
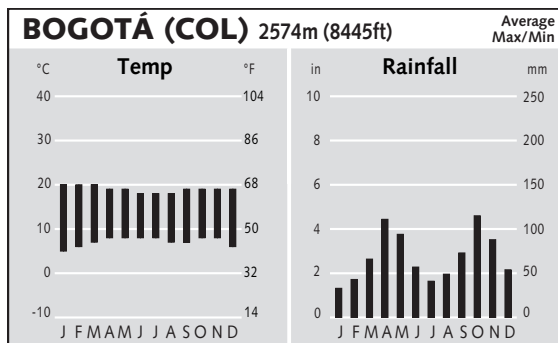
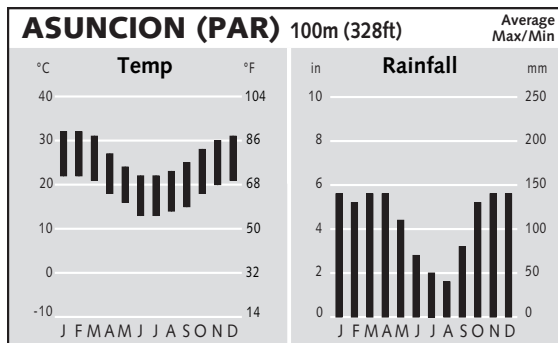
The main arid regions are northern Chile (the Atacama Desert is one of the world's driest) and Peru, between the Andes and the Pacific Coast, where the cold Humboldt current creates a cloudy but dry climate. There are two smaller arid zones, along the north coast of Colombia and Venezuela and the Brazilian *sertão* (the drought-prone backlands of the country's northeast).

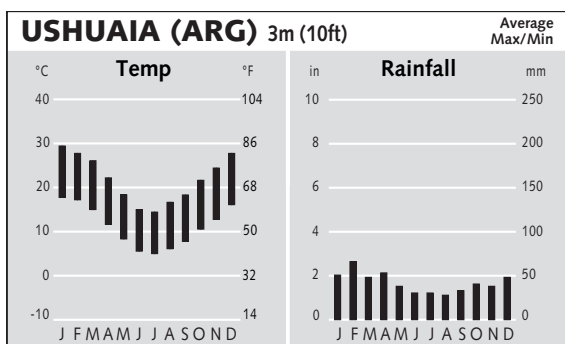
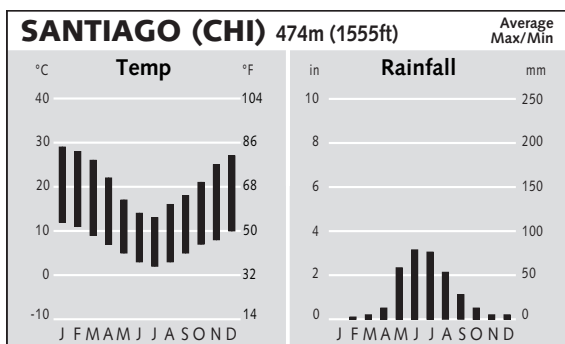
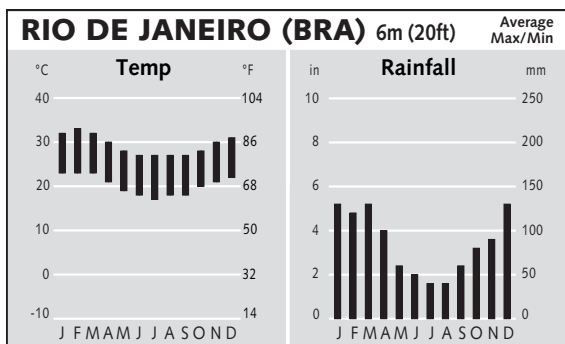
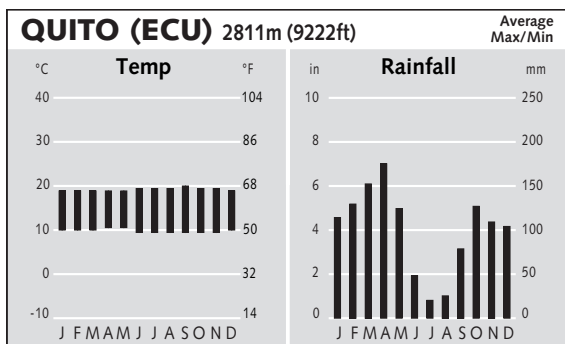
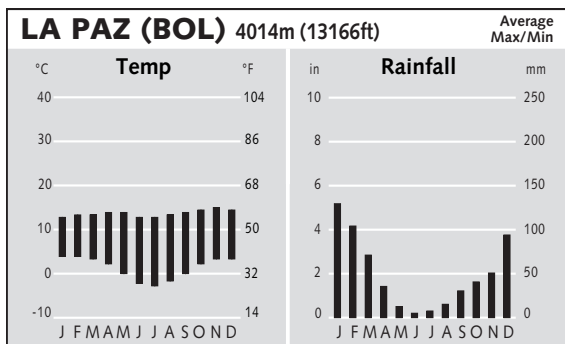
The high Andes, which have altitudes of more than 3500m, and far southern Chile and Argentina are cool climate zones, where average daily temperatures fall below 10°C (50°F) and temperatures can dip below freezing.

Below the equator, summer is from December to February, while winter is from June to August.

El Niño & La Niña

About every seven years, large-scale changes in ocean circulation patterns and rising sea-surface temperatures create 'El Niño,' bringing





heavy rain and floods to desert areas, plunging tropical areas into drought and disrupting weather patterns worldwide. The 1997-98 winter was particularly destructive and traumatic for Peru and Ecuador, including the Galápagos Islands where wildlife perished at alarming rates. The name El Niño (The Child) refers to the fact that this phenomena usually appears around Christmas.

El Niños are often followed by La Niñas the next year, where the opposite effects are observed and can include bridge and road destruction, flooding of entire villages and subsequent refugee crises, raging forest fires in drought areas, malaria epidemics due to stagnant floodwater and lower fish catches due to increased water temperatures.

CUSTOMS

Customs vary slightly from country to country, but you can generally bring in personal belongings, camera gear, laptops, 'hand-held' devices and other travel-related gear. All countries prohibit the export (just as home countries prohibit the import) of archaeological items and goods made from rare or endangered animals (snake skins, cat pelts, jewelry made with teeth etc). Avoid carrying plants, seeds, fruits and fresh meat products across borders. If you're traveling overland to/from Colombia, expect thorough customs inspections on both sides of the border.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

There are potential dangers to travel in South America, but most areas are safe, and with sensible precautions, you are highly unlikely to encounter problems. Your greatest annoyances will likely be pollution, fiesta fireworks and low-hanging objects (watch your head!). For thoughts on bus safety, see p1085. Also see the Dangers & Annoyances sections in individual chapter directories; Brazil's (p400) offers some pointers that are useful throughout the whole of South America.

Confidence Tricks & Scams

Tricks involving a quantity of cash being 'found' on the street, whereby the do-gooder tries to return it to you, elaborate hard-luck stories from supposed travelers, and 'on-the-spot fines' by bogus police are just some of the scams designed to separate you from your money. Be especially wary if one or more 'plainclothes' cops demand to search your

luggage or examine your documents, traveler's checks or cash. Insist that you will allow this only at an official police station or in the presence of a uniformed officer, and don't allow anyone to take you anywhere in a taxi or unmarked car. Thieves often work in pairs to distract you while lifting your wallet. Simply stay alert. See also p1068.

Drugs

Marijuana and cocaine are big business in parts of South America, and are available in many places but illegal everywhere. Imbibing can either land you in jail, land your money in the hands of a thief, or worse. Unless you're willing to take these risks, avoid illegal drugs.

Beware that drugs are sometimes used to set up travelers for blackmail and bribery. Avoid any conversation with someone proffering drugs. If you're in an area where drug trafficking is prevalent, ignore it entirely, with conviction.

Lonely Planet has received a couple of letters from travelers who were unwittingly drugged and robbed after accepting food from a stranger. You can see the mistake made here.

In Bolivia and Peru, coca leaves are sold legally in *tiendas* (stores) or markets for about US\$1.50 for a pocket-size bag (including chewing paraphernalia; cheaper if you know where to get it). *Mate de coca* is a tea made by infusing coca leaves in boiling water. It's served in many cafés and restaurants in the Andean region, and coca-leaf 'tea bags' are also available. Although *maté de coca* is widely believed to combat the effects of altitude, there is no evidence that conclusively supports this, and a cup of *maté de coca* has no immediate stimulant effect.

The practice of chewing coca leaves goes back centuries and is still common among *campesinos* (peasant farmers) of the Andean *altiplano*. The icky tasting leaves are chewed with a little ash or bicarbonate of soda, as the alkalinity releases the mild stimulant contained in the leaf cells. Prolonged chewing dulls the pangs of hunger, thirst, cold and fatigue, but the initial effect just makes your mouth go numb. Without the alkaline catalyst, chewing coca leaves doesn't do much at all.

Be aware that someone who has chewed coca leaves or taken *maté de coca* may test positive for cocaine in the following weeks.

More refined forms of coca are illegal everywhere and transporting coca leaves over international borders is also illegal.

Natural Hazards

The Pacific Rim 'ring of fire' loops through eastern Asia, Alaska and all the way down through the Americas to Tierra del Fuego in a vast circle of earthquake and volcanic activity that includes the whole Pacific side of South America. In 1991, for example, Volcán Hudson in Chile's Aisén region erupted, burying parts of southern Patagonia knee-deep in ash. In 2002 Volcán Reventador (literally the 'exploder') erupted and blanketed Quito and other areas in northern Ecuador in ash. Volcanoes usually give some notice before blowing and are therefore unlikely to pose any immediate threat to travelers. Earthquakes are common, occur without warning and can be very serious. Andean construction rarely meets seismic safety standards; adobe buildings are particularly vulnerable. If you're in an earthquake, get in a doorway or dive under a table immediately; don't go outside.

Police & Military

Corruption is a very serious problem among Latin American police, who are generally poorly paid, trained and supervised. In some places, they are not beyond planting drugs on travelers or enforcing minor regulations in hopes of extracting *coimas* (bribes).

If you are stopped by 'plainclothes policemen,' never get into a vehicle with them. Don't give them any documents or show them any money, and don't take them to your hotel. If the police appear to be the real thing, insist on going to a police station on foot.

The military often maintains considerable influence, even under civilian governments. Avoid approaching military installations, which may display warnings such as 'No stopping or photographs – the sentry will shoot.' In the event of a coup or other emergency, state-of-siege regulations suspend civil rights. Always carry identification and be sure someone knows your whereabouts. Contact your embassy or consulate for advice.

Theft

Theft can be a problem, especially in Colombia, Peru, Ecuador and parts of Brazil, but remember that fellow travelers can also

be accomplished crooks, so where there's a backpacker scene, there may also be thievery. Here are some common-sense suggestions to limit your liability:

- A small padlock is useful for securing your pack zippers and hostel door, if necessary. When used to secure your pack zippers, twist ties, paper clips or safety pins can be another effective deterrent.
- Even if you're just running down the hall, never leave your hotel door unlocked.
- Always conceal your money belt and its contents, preferably beneath your clothing.
- Keep your spending money separate from the big stuff (credit cards, traveler's checks, tickets etc).
- Pack lightly and you can stash your pack under your seat on the bus. Otherwise you'll enjoy the anxiety of wondering if your pack is staying on the roof every time you stop. It usually does, but... Some swear by grain sacks – buy one at a market, stick your pack in it and it looks just like the local haul, as well as keeping your pack from getting dirty.
- To deter pack slashers, keep moving when you're wearing a backpack and wear your daypack on your chest in crowded markets or terminals.
- Learn the taxi situation – there have been problems in Lima, Peru (where taxi drivers have participated in passenger robberies) and Bogotá, Colombia, home of the so-called 'millionaire's tour,' which involves armed robbers jumping into taxis and forcedly touring passengers from ATM to ATM.

Trouble Spots

Some countries and areas are more dangerous than others. The more dangerous places (see individual country chapters for details) warrant extra care, but don't feel you should avoid them altogether. Though much of Colombia is far safer than it was several years ago, continued armed conflict means parts of the country are still off-limits. The northern border region of Ecuador, specifically in the Oriente, can be dodgy due to spill-over from the armed conflict in Colombia. Travelers have been assaulted at remote and even well-touristed archeological sites, primarily in Peru; stay informed. La Paz (Bolivia), Caracas (Venezuela) and the Mariscal Sucre neighbor-

hood of Quito (Ecuador) are notorious for assaults on tourists.

For more detailed information about trouble spots in specific countries see the Dangers & Annoyances sections in the individual country Directories.

DISCOUNT CARDS

A Hostelling International-American Youth Hostel (HI-AYH) membership card can be useful in Brazil and Chile (and to a lesser extent in Argentina and Uruguay) where there are many hostels, and accommodations tend to be, or traditionally have been, costlier. Elsewhere on the continent, cheap hotels and *pensiones* typically cost less than affiliated hostels.

An International Student Identity Card (ISIC) can provide discounted admission to archaeological sites and museums. It may also entitle you to reductions on bus, train and air tickets. In less developed countries, student discounts are rare, although high-ticket items such as the entrance to Machu Picchu (discounted 50% for ISIC holders under 26) may be reduced. In some countries, such as Argentina, almost any form of university identification will suffice where discounts are offered.

DISCRIMINATION

Discrimination in South America – and it's a different beast in every country – is complex and full of contradictions. The most serious reports of racism experienced by travelers have been from black travelers who were denied access to nightclubs, in some cases until the doorman realized they were foreigners. Some black travelers describe experiencing genuine curiosity from people who simply aren't used to seeing folks of black African descent. The Afro-Peruvian presence on Peru's South Coast makes it a welcoming place for travelers of color.

A posting on the **Lonely Planet Thorntree** (www.lonelyplanet.com) generated several responses from travelers of color who felt perfectly safe traveling in South America. Mixed-race couples may also receive curious looks from time to time. South Americans love to nickname people based on their appearance – *flaca* (skinny), *gordo* (chubby) – and a favorite for dark-skinned people is *negro/a* (literally 'black'). If you have darker skin, regardless of your heritage, you can expect to be called this – it's nearly always used affectionately.

See also Women Travelers (p1074) and Gay & Lesbian Travelers (below).

DRIVER'S LICENSE

If you're planning to drive anywhere, obtain an International Driving Permit or Inter-American Driving Permit (Uruguay theoretically recognizes only the latter). For about US\$10 to US\$15, any motoring organization will issue one, provided you have a current driver's license. See also p1085.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

For embassy and consulate addresses and phone numbers, see the Directory in individual country chapters.

As a visitor in a South American country, it's important to realize what your own embassy – the embassy of the country of which you are a citizen – can and cannot do. Generally speaking, it won't be much help in emergencies where you're even remotely at fault. Remember that you are bound by the laws of the country you are in. Your embassy will not be sympathetic if you end up in jail after committing a crime locally, even if such actions are legal in your own country.

In genuine emergencies you may get some assistance, but only if other channels have been exhausted. For example, if you have all your money and documents stolen, it might assist in getting a new passport, but a loan for onward travel will be out of the question.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

South America has some fabulous fiestas, from indigenous harvest festivals to wild New Year parties. Some festivals, such as **Carnaval**, which is celebrated in Salvador (p339) and Rio (p280) around Lent in February/March, are worth planning your trip around. However, it's worth taking into account that some places are crowded and expensive, and it might be difficult to find accommodations. Remember, Carnaval is celebrated throughout the continent if you can't make it to Brazil.

For more information, see Festivals & Events in the individual country directories. Also see p12.

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELERS

Brazil is the most gay-friendly country on the continent, especially in Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo and Salvador. Buenos Aires, however, has recently knocked Rio off the throne for

title of 'gay capital' of South America, attracting more gay visitors than anywhere on the continent. That said, outwardly gay couples may be harassed in other parts of Argentina and Brazil. Bogotá, and to a lesser extent Santiago, also have lively gay scenes. Elsewhere on the continent, where public displays of affection by same-sex couples may provoke negative reactions, do as the locals do – be discreet to avoid problems.

Despite a growing number of publications and websites devoted to gay travel, few have specific advice on South America. One exception is **Purple Roofs** (www.purple.roofs.com), an excellent guide to gay-friendly accommodations throughout South America. The gay travel newsletter *Out and About* occasionally covers South America, and its website, **Out & About** (www.outandabout.com), offers subscribers online content about eight South American countries.

There's far more gay and lesbian information on country-specific websites (see respective chapter Directories), and there are a few sites with general information on South America. There are heaps of helpful travel links listed under the Businesses and Regional pages at **Pridelinks.com** (www.pridelinks.com). Though you have to sift through the superfluous stuff, there's some helpful travel information at **BluWay** (www.bluway.com).

INSURANCE

A travel insurance policy covering theft, loss, accidents and illness is highly recommended. Many policies include a card with toll-free numbers for 24-hour assistance, and it's good practice to carry that with you. Note that some policies compensate travelers for misrouted or lost luggage. Baggage insurance is worth its price in peace of mind. Also check that the coverage includes worst-case scenarios: ambulances, evacuations or an emergency flight home. Some policies specifically exclude 'dangerous activities,' which can include scuba diving, motorcycling, even trekking. If such activities are on your agenda, avoid this sort of policy.

There are a wide variety of policies available and your travel agent will be able to make recommendations. The policies handled by **STA Travel** (www.statravel.com) and other student-travel organizations usually offer good value. If a policy offers lower and higher medical-expense options, the low-expenses policy should be OK for South America – medical

costs are not nearly as high here as elsewhere in the world.

If you have baggage insurance and need to make a claim, the insurance company may demand a receipt as proof that you bought the stuff in the first place. You must usually inform the insurance company by airmail and report the loss or theft to local police within 24 hours. Make a list of stolen items and their value. At the police station, you complete a *denuncia* (statement), a copy of which is given to you for your insurance claim. The *denuncia* usually has to be made on *papel sellado* (stamped paper), which you can buy at any stationer.

For information on health insurance, see p1090; for car insurance, p1088.

INTERNET ACCESS

Except for the most backwoods places, internet access is available nearly everywhere. Rates range from US25¢ to US\$5 per hour, but generally hover near the lower end of this spectrum. This book lists internet access points in most towns and cities. Either 'Alt + 64' or 'Alt-Gr + 2' is the command to get the '@' symbol on almost any Spanish-language keyboard.

INTERNET RESOURCES

There's no better place to start your Web explorations than the **Lonely Planet** (www.lonelyplanet.com) website. Here you'll find succinct summaries on traveling to most places on earth, postcards from other travelers and the Thorn Tree forum, where you can ask questions before you go or dispense advice upon your return. You'll also find travel news and travel links that will connect you to the most useful travel resources elsewhere on the web.

Most of the other interesting Internet sites about South America are devoted to specific countries within the continent – see the individual country chapters for suggestions. For websites dealing with responsible travel, see the Responsible Travel section on p4. The following are all useful sites related to the continent or travel as a whole:

Latin American Network Information

Center (Lanic; www.lanic.utexas.edu) University of Texas' outstanding list of links to all things Latin American.

Latin World (www.latinworld.com) Latin American search engine with loads of links.

South American Explorers (www.saexplorers.org) Excellent starting point for internet research.

UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO; www.fco.gov.uk) British government site with travel advisories and the like.

US State Department (www.state.gov) Travel advisories and tips; rather alarmist.

LANGUAGE

Spanish is the first language of the vast majority of South Americans; Brazilians speak Portuguese, but may understand Spanish as well. Without a basic knowledge of Spanish, travel in South America can be difficult and your interaction with local people will be limited. French is spoken in French Guiana, Dutch and English are spoken in Suriname, and English is spoken in Guyana.

Lonely Planet publishes the handy, pocket-size *Latin American Spanish Phrasebook*, and *Brazilian Phrasebook*. For a very brief introduction to Spanish and some useful phrases, see the Language chapter (p1098).

There are hundreds of distinct indigenous languages in South America, although some of them are spoken by only a few people. In the Andean countries and parts of Chile and Argentina, millions of people speak Quechua or Aymara as a first language, and many do not use Spanish at all. Quechua was the official language of the Inca empire and is most widely spoken in the Inca heartland of Peru and Ecuador (where it's called Quichua). Aymara was the language of the pre-Inca Tiahuanaco culture, and it survives around Lake Titicaca and in much of Bolivia. For a few useful words and phrases, see the Language chapter (p1098). If you're serious about learning more, or will be spending a lot of time in remote areas, look around La Paz or Cuzco for a good language course. Lonely Planet's *Quechua Phrasebook* is primarily for travelers to Peru and contains grammar and vocabulary in the Cuzco dialect, but will also be useful for visitors to the Bolivian and Ecuadorian highlands.

LEGAL MATTERS

In city police stations, you might find an English-speaking interpreter, but don't bank on it: in most cases you'll either have to speak the local language or provide an interpreter. Some cities have a tourist police service, which can be more helpful.

Replacing a lost or stolen passport will likely be expensive and time-consuming. If you are robbed, photocopies (even better, certified copies) of original passports, visas

and air tickets and careful records of credit card numbers and traveler's checks will prove invaluable during replacement procedures. Replacement passport applications are usually referred to the home country, so it helps to leave a copy of your passport details with someone back home.

For more info, see p1063 and p1066.

MAPS

International Travel Maps & Books (www.itmb.com) produces a range of excellent maps of Central and South America. For the whole continent, they have a reliable three-sheet map at a 1:4,000,000 scale and a memorial edition of their classic 1:500,000 map. The maps are huge for road use, but they're helpful for pretrip planning. More detailed ITMB maps are available for the Amazon Basin, Ecuador, Bolivia and Venezuela. All are available on the ITMB website.

Maps of the South American continent as a whole are widely available; check any well-stocked map or travel bookstore. **South American Explorers** (www.saexplorers.org) has scores of reliable maps, including topographical, regional and city maps. For more information, see p649. Most South American countries have an Instituto Geográfico Militar, a military-governmental body that publishes and sells excellent topographical and other maps of its respective country. Once you're in a South American country, check the capital city for a location. See the individual country chapters for more suggestions.

MONEY

As in all of Lonely Planet's Latin American titles, prices here are quoted in US dollars. The reason for this is the historical instability of Latin American currencies. With widespread inflation throughout the Americas, the US dollar provides a stable platform, ensuring that listings are up-to-date and accurate throughout the life of a book. This does not in any way imply that US dollars are accepted in these countries; rather it gives the reader a base from which to gauge relative costs, as more travelers have more of an idea of what US\$10 means than CH\$5,428.

ATMs

Bring an ATM card. ATMs are available in most cities and large towns, and are almost always the most convenient, reliable and

economical way of getting cash. The rate of exchange is usually as good as, or better than, any bank or legal moneychanger. Many ATMs are connected to the Cirrus or Plus network, but many countries prefer one over the other. To search for ATMs in specific countries honoring either network, see www.mastercard.com and www.visa.com and click on ATM Locator. If your ATM card gets swallowed by a machine, generally the only thing you can do is call your bank and cancel the card. Cards usually only get swallowed when there's something wrong with your account (like insufficient funds). It's advisable to call your bank and let it know you'll be using your card throughout South America – that way the bank won't put a hold on it if it assumes suspicious activity.

Many ATMs will accept a personal identification number (PIN) of only four digits; find out whether this applies to the specific countries you're traveling to before heading off.

Bargaining

Bargaining is accepted and expected when contracting long-term accommodations and when shopping for craft goods in markets. Haggling is a near sport in the Andean countries, with patience, humor and respect serving as the ground rules of the game. Bargaining is much less common in the Southern Cone. When you head into the bargaining trenches, remember that the point is to have fun while reaching a mutually satisfying end: the merchant should not try to fleece you, but you shouldn't try to get something for nothing either.

Black Market

Nowadays, official exchange rates are quite realistic in most South American countries, so the role of the black market is declining. Most people end up using the *mercado negro* (black market) when crossing isolated borders, where an official exchange facility might be hours away. You might still want to use street moneychangers if you need to exchange cash outside business hours, but with the convenience of ATM cards, this necessity is declining.

If you do use street moneychangers, use the following common sense: be discreet, as it's often illegal, although it's usually tolerated. Have the exact amount handy to avoid flashing large wads of cash. Beware of sleight-

of-hand tricks – insist on personally counting out the notes you are handed one by one, and don't hand over your dollars until you're satisfied you have the exact amount agreed upon. One common trick is to hand you the agreed amount, less a few pesos, so that, on counting it, you complain that it's short. They take it back, recount it, discover the 'mistake,' top it up and hand it back, in the process spiriting away some of the larger bills. For certainty, recount it yourself and don't be distracted by supposed alarms such as 'police' or 'danger.' Decline to accept torn, smudged or tattered bills. Other scams to watch out for include the old fixed calculator trick (in which the calculator gives an exchange rate favorable to the changer) and passing counterfeit bills.

Cash

It's convenient, but not crucial, to have a small wad of US cash tucked away because it's exchangeable for local currency just about anywhere. Of course, unlike traveler's checks, nobody will give you a refund for lost or stolen cash (if you find someone, let us know). When you're about to cross from one country to another, it's handy to change some small dollar bills rather than a traveler's check. Dollars are also useful when there's a black/parallel market or unofficial exchange rate. In some places you can exchange US-dollar traveler's checks for US cash at banks and *casas de cambio* (currency-exchange houses), in order to replenish your stash (or you can stock up in Ecuador, where the US dollar is the official currency). Trying to exchange ragged notes can be a hassle, so procure crisp bills before setting out.

In some countries, especially in rural areas, *cambio* (change) can be particularly hard to come by. Businesses even occasionally refuse to sell you something if they can't or don't want to change your note. So break down those larger bills whenever you have the opportunity, such as at busy restaurants, banks and larger businesses.

Credit Cards

The big-name credit cards are accepted at most large stores, travel agencies and better hotels and restaurants. Credit card purchases sometimes attract an extra *recargo* (surcharge) on the price (anywhere from 2% to 10%), but they are usually billed to your account at quite favorable exchange rates. Some banks issue cash advances on major credit cards. The most

widely accepted card is Visa, followed by MasterCard (those with UK Access should insist on its affiliation with MasterCard). American Express and Diners Club are also accepted in many places. Beware of credit card fraud (especially in Brazil) – never let the card out of your sight.

Exchanging Money

Traveler's checks and foreign cash can be changed at *casas de cambio* or banks. Rates are usually similar, but *casas de cambio* are quicker, less bureaucratic and open longer hours. Street moneychangers, who may or may not be legal, will only handle cash. Sometimes you can also change money unofficially at hotels or in shops that sell imported goods (electronics dealers are an obvious choice).

It is preferable to bring money in US dollars, although banks and *casas de cambio* in capital cities will change euros, pounds sterling, Japanese yen and other major currencies. Changing these currencies in smaller towns and on the street is next to impossible.

Traveler's Checks

The safest way to carry money is in traveler's checks, although they're not nearly as convenient as ATM cards. American Express are the most widely accepted checks, while Visa, Thomas Cook and Citibank are equally the next best. To facilitate replacement in case of theft, keep a record of check numbers and the original bill of sale in a safe place. Even with proper records, replacement can take time. A good way to safely keep copies of your check numbers is to email them to yourself; leave the email in your inbox, and the numbers will be available anywhere there's internet.

Have some traveler's checks in small denominations, say US\$50. If you carry only large denominations, you might find yourself stuck with copious amounts of local currency when leaving a country.

In some countries, notably Argentina and to a lesser extent Peru, traveler's checks are more difficult to cash, and banks and *casas de cambio* charge commissions as high as 10%.

PASSPORT

A passport is essential – make sure it's valid for at least six months beyond the projected end of your trip and has plenty of blank pages for stamp-happy officials. Carrying a photocopy of your passport (so you can leave the

original in your hotel) is sometimes enough if you're walking around a town, but *always* have the original if you travel anywhere (never get on a bus leaving town without it). To reduce the risk of hassles in the event you are asked for your papers, keep the original with you at all times.

PHOTOGRAPHY & VIDEO

Consumer electronics are readily available throughout South America, but taxes can kick prices through the roof.

Digital

Digital cameras make photography easy, cheap and fun. Emailing pictures to friends back home or posting them to a travel blog is a cinch. If you plan to print, you should shoot with no less than four megapixels. The best solution for storing photos on the road is a portable hard drive, which, if you really style yourself, can double as an MP3 player. If you can't afford a storage device, it's possible to burn your photos to CD at nearly any of South America's plethora of cyber cafés.

Film & Equipment

A good range of reasonably priced film, including B&W and slide, is obtainable in the biggest cities. Standard rolls of ASA 400 film can be found in nearly all cities and towns of reasonable size. For low-light conditions in the rainforests, carry a few rolls of high-speed (ASA 400 or faster) film and a flash.

Photo processing is relatively expensive, but widely available. Have one roll processed and check the results before you hand over your whole stash.

Photographing People

Ask for permission before photographing individuals, particularly 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), permission is not usually necessary – but if in doubt, ask or refrain. If you're after local-market pictures, purchasing items from a vendor may result in permission to photograph them or their wares. Paying folks for their portrait is a personal decision; in most cases, the subject will tell you right off the going rate for a photo.

Restrictions

Some tourist sites charge an additional fee for tourists with cameras. It's unwise and possibly illegal to take photos of military installations and personnel or security-sensitive places such as police stations. In most churches, flash photography (and sometimes photography period) is not allowed.

Video & DVD

Go digital. If you can't, 8mm cassettes for video cameras are available if you really search. Tourist sites that charge for still cameras often charge more for a video camera. If you want to buy a prerecorded videocassette, remember that different countries use different TV and video systems. For example, Colombia and Venezuela use the NTSC system (as in the USA), while Brazil uses PAL, and French Guiana uses the French SECAM system. DVD systems are the same throughout the world.

POST

International postal rates can be quite expensive. Generally, important mail and parcels should be sent by registered or certified service; otherwise, they may go missing. Sending parcels can be awkward: often an *aduana* (customs) officer must inspect the contents before a postal clerk can accept them, so wait to seal your package until after it has been checked. Most post offices have a parcels window, usually signed *encomiendas* (parcels). The place for posting overseas parcels is sometimes different from the main post office.

UPS, FedEx, DHL and other private postal services are available in most countries, but are outrageously expensive.

If you're sending parcels to North America, it's generally cheaper to send them from northern South American countries such as Ecuador or Venezuela.

Local Addresses

Some South American addresses in this book contain a post-office box number as well as a street address. A post-office box is known as an *apartado* (abbreviated 'Ap' or 'Apto') or a *casilla de correos* (abbreviated 'Casilla' or 'CC'). When addresses do not have an official number, which happens regularly in rural areas, the abbreviation 's/n' for *sin numero* (without number) is often used.

Receiving Mail

The simplest way to receive mail is to have letters sent to you c/o Lista de Correos ('Posta Restante' in Brazil), followed by the name of the city and country where you expect to be. Mail addressed like this will always be sent to that city's main post office. In most places, the service is free or almost so. Most post offices hold mail for a month or two. American Express operates a mail service for clients.

Bring your passport when collecting mail. If awaited correspondence seems to have gone missing, ask the clerk to check under every possible combination of your initials. To simplify matters, have your letters addressed with only your first and surnames, with the latter underlined and in capital letters.

STUDYING

Spanish-language courses are available in most South American cities, with Cuzco (Peru; p870), Arequipa (Peru; p857), Cuenca (Ecuador; p688) and Buenos Aires (Argentina; p47; especially now that it's cheap) being some of the best. For Portuguese, Rio de Janeiro (Brazil; p280) is a great place to spend some time studying. For Quechua and Aymara, try Cochabamba (Bolivia; p227) or Cuzco (p870).

For country-specific details, see individual country chapters, and for school listings, see individual cities. **Language Schools Guide** (www.languageschoolsguide.com) is a great place to begin your research online.

TELEPHONE

Traditionally, governments have operated the national and international telecommunications systems and, traditionally, services have been horrid. Many countries have privatized their phone systems, choosing high charges over poor service, but sometimes getting both. International calls are particularly expensive from Bolivia and Colombia and are perhaps cheapest from Chile and Argentina.

Direct dial lines, accessed via special numbers and billed to an account at home, have made international calls much simpler. There are different access numbers for each telephone company in each country – get a list from your phone company before you leave.

It is sometimes cheaper to make a collect (reverse-charge) or credit-card call overseas than to pay for the call at the source. Often the best way is to make a quick international call and have the other party call you back (some

telephone offices allow this, others don't). Keep your eyes peeled for 'net-to-phone' capabilities, where calls can be as cheap as US25¢ per minute to the USA and Europe.

Nearly every town and city has a telephone office with a row of phone booths for local and international calls.

Cell Phones

Cell (or mobile) phone numbers throughout South America often have different area codes than fixed line numbers, even if the cellular phone owner resides in the same city. Calling a cell phone number is often more expensive (sometimes exorbitantly so) than calling a fixed line.

If you plan to carry your own cellular phone, a GSM tri- or quad-band phone is your best bet, though you still won't get coverage everywhere – for example, you cannot currently get reception in Ecuador with a tri-band phone. Remember, the prices for calls can be extremely high.

Another option is purchasing a prepaid SIM card (or cards) for the countries where you plan on traveling. You will need a compatible international GSM cell phone that is SIM-unlocked.

This is a rapidly changing field, and you can stay up to date by checking www.kropla.com and www.gsmworld.com.

Phone Cards

Usually, the cheapest way to make an international call is by using a phonecard, the type you purchase at a kiosk or corner store. These allow you to call North America or Europe for as cheap as US3¢ per minute with a good card. The caveat is that you need a private phone line or a permissive telephone kiosk operator to use them.

TOILETS

There are two toilet rules for South America: always carry your own toilet paper and don't ever throw anything into the toilet bowl. Except in the most developed places, South American sewer systems can't handle toilet paper, so all paper products must be discarded in the wastebasket. Another general rule is to use public bathrooms whenever you can, as you never know when your next opportunity will be. Folks posted outside bathrooms proferring swaths of paper require payment. For a list of clean bathrooms worldwide – and proof

that you can find anything online – check out the **Bathroom Diaries** (www.thebathroomdiaries.com).

TOURIST INFORMATION

Every country in South America has government-run tourist offices, but their breadth of coverage and quality vary. Local tourist offices are listed throughout this book wherever they exist.

South American Explorers (SAE; www.saexplorers.org) is by far one of the most helpful organizations for travelers to South America. Founded in 1977, SAE functions as an information center for travelers, adventurers and researchers. It supports scientific fieldwork, mountaineering and other expeditions, wilderness conservation and social development in Latin America. It has traveler clubhouses in Buenos Aires (p50), Lima (p836), Cuzco (p871) and Quito (p649), as well as the **US office** (☎ 607-277-0488 or toll-free ☎ 800-274-0568; 126 Indian Creek Rd, Ithaca, NY 14850), which publishes the quarterly magazine, *South American Explorer*. The clubhouses have extensive libraries of books, maps and traveler's reports, plus a great atmosphere. The club itself sells maps, books and other items at its offices and by mail order.

Annual SAE membership is US\$50/80 per individual/couple or US\$30 per person with a group of four or more and includes four issues of *South American Explorer* magazine. Members receive access to the club's information service, libraries, storage facilities, mail service and book exchange, and discounts at numerous hotels and travel services. Joining online or at any clubhouse is easy.

TRAVELERS WITH DISABILITIES

In general, South America is not well set up for disabled travelers, but the more modernized, Southern Cone countries are slightly more accommodating – notably Chile, Argentina and perhaps the main cities of Brazil. Unfortunately, cheap local lodgings probably won't be well-equipped to deal with physically challenged travelers; air travel will be more feasible than local buses (although this isn't impossible); and well-developed tourist attractions will be more accessible than off-the-beaten-track destinations. Start your research here:

Access-able Travel Source (www.access-able.com) Offers little information specifically on South America, but provides some good general travel advice.

All Go Here Airline Directory (www.everybody.co.uk/airindex.htm) Lists airline by airline services available to disabled passengers.

Emerging Horizons (www.emerginghorizons.com) Features well-written articles and regular columns full of handy advice.

Mobility International (www.miusa.org) US-based. Advises travelers with disabilities and runs educational-exchange programs – a good way to visit South America.

National Information Communication Awareness Network (Nican; www.nican.com.au) For folks from Australia and New Zealand.

Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation (www.radar.org.uk) Good resource for travelers from the UK.

Society for Accessible Travel & Hospitality (SATH; www.sath.org) Good, general travel information; based in the USA.

VISAS & DOCUMENTS

A visa is an endorsement in your passport (p1069), usually a big stamp, permitting you to enter a country and remain for a specified period of time. It's obtained from a foreign embassy or consulate of that country – not *in* that country. You can often get them in your home country, but it's also usually possible to get them en route, which may be better if you have a flexible itinerary: most visas are only good for a limited period after they're issued. Ask other travelers about the best places to get visas, since two consulates of the same country may enforce different requirements.

If you really need a visa fast, kiss ass and explain your needs. Consulates can often be very helpful if the officials sympathize and your papers are in order. Sometimes they will charge a fee for fast processing, but don't mistake this for a bribe.

Nationals of most European countries and Japan require few visas, but travelers from the USA need some, and those from Australia, New Zealand or South Africa might need several. Carry a handful of passport-size photographs for visa applications (although most border towns have a photographer who can do the honors).

Visa requirements are given in the Fast Facts section at the beginning of each country chapter, but a summary follows. Some countries issue tourist cards to visitors on arrival; while traveling within those countries, carry your tourist card with you at all times. Residents of most countries will not need visas for

Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, French Guiana or Peru; consult the following list for other destinations.

Brazil Residents of Canada, the USA, Australia, New Zealand and Japan require visas (p407).

Falkland Islands/Islas Malvinas For non-Britons, visa requirements are generally the same as those for foreigners visiting the UK, although Argentines must obtain an advance visa. Any queries regarding entry requirements for the Falkland Islands should be directed to the British embassy in your home country (p41).

Paraguay Residents of Canada, the USA, Australia and New Zealand require visas (p819).

Suriname Residents of Canada, the USA, Australia, New Zealand, France, Germany, the UK and the Netherlands require visas (p773).

If you need a visa for a certain country and arrive at a land border without one, be prepared to backtrack to the nearest town with a consulate to get one. Airlines won't normally let you board a plane for a country to which you don't have the necessary visa. Also, a visa in itself does not guarantee entry: you may still be turned back at the border if you don't have 'sufficient funds' or an onward or return ticket.

Onward or Return Tickets

Several countries require you to have a ticket out of their country before they will admit you at the border, grant you a visa or let you board their national airline. (See individual country Directory chapters for specifics.) The onward or return ticket requirement can be a major nuisance for travelers who want to fly into one country and travel overland through others. Officially, Peru, Colombia, Ecuador, Venezuela, Bolivia, Brazil, Suriname and French Guiana demand onward tickets, but only Brazil, Suriname and French Guiana are strict about it. Still, if you arrive in one of the countries technically requiring an onward ticket or sufficient funds and aggravate or in any way piss off a border guard, they *can* enforce these rules (yet another reason to be pleasant and neatly dressed at border crossings).

While proof of onward or return tickets is rarely asked for by South American border officials, airline officials, especially in the US, have begun to refuse boarding passengers with one-way tickets who cannot show proof of onward or return travel or proof of citizenship in the destination country.

One way around this is to purchase a cheap, fully refundable ticket (from, say, Caracas to Miami) and cash it in after your arrival. The downside is that the refund can take up to three months. Before purchasing the ticket, you should also ask specifically where you can get a refund, as some airlines will only refund tickets at the office of purchase or at their head office.

Any ticket out of South America plus sufficient funds are usually an adequate substitute for an onward ticket. Having a major credit card or two may help.

Sufficient Funds

Sufficient funds are often *technically* required but rarely asked for. Immigration officials may ask (verbally or on the application form) about your financial resources. If you lack 'sufficient funds' for your proposed visit, officials may limit the length of your stay, but once you are in the country, you can usually extend your visa by showing a wad of traveler's checks or producing a credit card.

VOLUNTEERING

Poking around on the internet or browsing volunteer publications definitely makes one thing clear: your work alone is not enough. Most international volunteer organizations require a weekly or monthly fee (sometimes up to US\$1500 for two weeks, not including airfare) which can feel a bit harsh. This is usually to cover the costs of housing you, paying the organization's staff, rent, website fees and all that stuff. Whether it seems fair or not, your money is usually going to a good cause (or at least to the cause's bureaucracy). But what if you just want to donate your hard work? Is there an alternative? There is. But you'll have to look harder and search from within South America to find the sorts of organizations and places that need you. One opportunity is working for an eco-lodge or responsible tour group, both of which regularly need English-speaking staff. And the more you stick around, the more you find where you can help out – without paying thrice what you'd normally pay for food and lodging.

The advantage to setting up a volunteer position from home is that everything is taken care of for you and you can start working right away. This is usually an attractive option for people with less time and who speak little

Spanish or Portuguese. Adequate Spanish (or Portuguese in Brazil) is usually essential for any volunteer work in South America.

Whether you set up your position from home or in South America, if you're working for an organization, expect to provide your own food and lodging, or pay up to US\$300 per month. If you're setting up from home, you usually have to pay an application fee to boot. Checking out volunteer opportunities on the spot also gives you a closer look at exactly what you'll be doing before you start. One good place to do this is the South American Explorers (SAE; see p1072), which maintains a database of volunteer work. If you want to peek at what's available before you go, check the following websites:

Amerispan (www.amerispan.com/volunteer_intern) Volunteer and internship programs in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador and Peru.

Australian Volunteers International (www.ozvol.org.au) Sends qualified Australian volunteers to several spots in South America for one- to two-year volunteer stints.

Cross Cultural Solutions (www.crossculturalsolutions.org) Volunteer programs with and emphasis on cultural and human interaction in Brazil and Peru.

Idealist.org (www.idealist.org) Action Without Borders' searchable database of thousands of volunteer positions throughout the world. Excellent resource.

Rainforest Concern (www.rainforestconcern.org) British nonprofit offering paid but very affordable volunteer positions in forest environments in several South American countries.

Volunteer Abroad (www.volunteerabroad.com) Vast website housing links to hundreds of volunteer positions throughout South America. Great place to start.

Volunteer Latin America (www.volunteerlatinamerica.com) Worth a peek for its interesting programs throughout Latin America.

Working Abroad (www.workingabroad.com) Online network of grassroots volunteer opportunities with trip reports from the field.

WOMEN TRAVELERS

At one time or another, solo women travelers will find themselves the object of curiosity – sometimes well-intentioned, sometimes not. Avoidance is an easy, effective self-defense strategy. In the Andean region, particularly in smaller towns and rural areas, modest dress and conduct are the norm, while in Brazil and the more liberal Southern Cone, standards are more relaxed, especially in

beach areas; note, however, that virtually nowhere in South America is topless or nude bathing customary. When in doubt, follow the lead of local women.

Machista (macho) attitudes, stressing masculine pride and virility, are fairly widespread among South American men (although less so in indigenous communities). They are often expressed by boasting and in exaggerated attention toward women. Snappy put-down lines or other caustic comebacks to unwanted advances may make the man feel threatened, and he may respond aggressively. Most women find it easier to invent a husband and leave the guy with his pride intact, especially in front of others.

Consider taking a Spanish (or Portuguese) class (see p1071) – a command of the language can sometimes be the best way to ward off unwanted attention.

There have been isolated cases of South American men raping women travelers. Women trekking or taking tours in remote or isolated areas should be especially aware. Some cases have involved guides assaulting tour group members, so it's worth double-checking the identity and reputation of any guide or tour operator. Also be aware that women (and men) have been drugged, in bars and elsewhere, using drinks, cigarettes or pills. Police may not be very helpful in rape cases – if a local woman is raped, her family usually seeks revenge rather than calling the police. Tourist police may be more sympathetic, but it's possibly better to see a doctor and contact your embassy before reporting a rape to police.

Tampons are generally difficult to find in smaller towns, so stock up in cities or bring a supply from home. Birth control pills are sometimes tricky to find outside metropolitan areas, so you're best off bringing your own supply from home. If you can't bring enough, carry the original package with you so a pharmacist can match a local pill to yours. Pills in most South American countries are very inexpensive. 'Morning after' pills are readily available in some countries, notably Brazil.

The **International Planned Parenthood Federation website** (www.ippf.org) offers a wealth of information on member clinics (Family Planning Associations) throughout South America that provide contraception (and abortions where legal).

WORKING

Aside from teaching or tutoring English, opportunities for employment are few, low-paying and usually illegal. Even tutoring, despite good hourly rates, is rarely remunerative because it takes time to build up a clientele. The best opportunities for teaching English are in the larger cities, and, although you won't save much, it will allow you to stick around longer. Santiago, Rio and the larger cities of Brazil are the best bets for decent pay. Other work opportunities may exist for skilled guides or in restaurants and bars catering to travelers. Many people find work at foreign owned lodges and inns.

There are several excellent online resources, including the following:

Association of American Schools in South America (AASSA; www.aassa.com) Places accredited teachers in many academic subjects in preparatory schools throughout South America.

Dave's ESL Café (www.eslcafe.com) The first name in ESL on the Net, with loads of message boards, job boards, teaching ideas, information, links and more.

EnglishClub.com (www.englishclub.com) Great resource for ESL teachers and students.

TEFL Net (www.tefl.net) This is another rich online resource for teachers from the creators of EnglishClub.com.

Transportation

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GETTING THERE & AWAY

AIR

Every South American country has an international airport in its capital and often in major cities as well. Main gateways include Buenos Aires (Argentina); Caracas (Venezuela); La Paz (Bolivia); Lima (Peru); Quito (Ecuador); Rio de Janeiro (Brazil); and Santiago (Chile). Less frequently used international gateways include Asunción (Paraguay); Bogotá (Colombia); Guayaquil (Ecuador); Manaus, Recife, Salvador and São Paulo (Brazil); Montevideo (Uruguay); Río Gallegos (Argentina); and Santa Cruz (Bolivia).

The most frequent and direct flights to a South American country are likely to be with its national 'flag carrier' airline. They include the following:

Aero Continente (www.aerocontinente.com; Peru)

Aerolíneas Argentinas/Austral (www.aerolineas.com.ar; Argentina)

Avensa/Servivensa (www.avena.com.ve in Spanish; Venezuela)

Avianca (www.avianca.com; Colombia)

Lan (www.lan.com; Chile, Ecuador & Peru) Umbrella for LanChile, LanEcuador and LanPeru.

Lloyd Aéreo Boliviano (www.labairlines.com in Spanish; Bolivia)

Varig (www.varig.com.br; Brazil)

THINGS CHANGE...

The information in this chapter is particularly vulnerable to change. Check directly with the airline or a travel agent to make sure you understand how a fare (and ticket you may buy) works and be aware of the security requirements for international travel. Shop carefully. The details given in this chapter should be regarded as pointers and are not a substitute for your own careful, up-to-date research.

North American and European airlines offering regular South American connections include the following:

Air France (www.airfrance.com)

Air Madrid (www.airmadrid.com)

American Airlines (www.aa.com)

British Airways (www.britishairways.com)

Continental Airlines (www.continental.com)

Delta (www.delta.com)

Iberia (www.iberia.com)

KLM (www.klm.com)

Swiss (www.swiss.com)

Qantas (www.qantas.com.au)

Tickets

Airfares to South America depend on the usual criteria: point and date of departure, destination, your access to discount travel agencies and whether you can take advantage of advance-purchase fares and special offers. Airlines are the best source for finding information on routes, timetables and standard fares, but they rarely sell the cheapest tickets. Start shopping around as soon as you can, because the cheapest tickets must be bought months in advance, and popular, affordable flights sell out early.

Flights from North America, Europe, Australia and New Zealand may permit a stopover in South America en route to your destination city. This gives you a free air connection within the region, so it's worth considering when comparing flights. International flights may also include an onward connection at a much lower cost than a separate fare.

CLIMATE CHANGE & TRAVEL

Climate change is a serious threat to the ecosystems that humans rely upon, and air travel is the fastest-growing contributor to the problem. Lonely Planet regards travel, overall, as a global benefit, but believes we all have a responsibility to limit our personal impact on global warming.

Flying & Climate Change

Pretty much every form of motor transport generates CO₂ (the main cause of human-induced climate change) but planes are far and away the worst offenders, not just because of the sheer distances they allow us to travel, but because they release greenhouse gases high into the atmosphere. The statistics are frightening: two people taking a return flight between Europe and the US will contribute as much to climate change as an average household's gas and electricity consumption over a whole year.

Carbon Offset Schemes

Climatecare.org and other websites use 'carbon calculators' that allow travellers to offset the greenhouse gases they are responsible for with contributions to energy-saving projects and other climate-friendly initiatives in the developing world – including projects in India, Honduras, Kazakhstan and Uganda.

Lonely Planet, together with Rough Guides and other concerned partners in the travel industry, supports the carbon offset scheme run by climatecare.org. Lonely Planet offsets all of its staff and author travel.

For more information check out our website: www.lonelyplanet.com.

COURIER FLIGHTS

Courier flights offer outstanding value if you can tolerate the restrictions. Only the major cities are served, with London, Los Angeles and New York being the most common departure points. If you can get to one of these gateway cities and connect with a courier flight, you might save a big amount to occasional served destinations such as Rio de Janeiro or Buenos Aires. Courier operators include **Air Courier Association** (☎ in the US 800-822-0888; www.aircourier.org) and **International Association of Air Travel Couriers** (☎ 308-632-3273; www.courier.org).

RTW TICKETS

Some of the best deals for travelers visiting many countries on different continents are Round-the-World (RTW) tickets. Itineraries from the US, Europe or Australia can include five or more stopovers. Similar 'Circle Pacific' fares allow excursions between Australasia and South America. The downside is that you must choose your destinations at the time of purchase (although all but the first destination can usually be left open) and you may not be able stay more than 60 days in a country. Another option is putting together your own ticket with two or three stops and a return from another country. If you work

with a travel agent, it might work out cheaper than an RTW ticket.

Fares for RTW and Circle Pacific tickets can vary widely, but to get an idea, shop around at the following websites:

Airbrokers (www.airbrokers.com) US based. Offers customized RTW tickets that don't require you to stick within airline affiliates.

Airtreks (www.airtreks.com) US based.

Oneworld (www.oneworld.com) Alliance between nine airlines that offer circle and multicontinent tickets.

Roundtheworldflights.com (www.roundtheworldflights.com) UK based.

Star Alliance (www.staralliance.com) Airline alliance that allows you to build your own RTW ticket.

Although you can sometimes purchase a RTW ticket online, it's usually best (and often required) that you purchase this type of ticket through a travel or airline agent due to the complexity of the ticket. And for your own sanity, nothing is better than a good agent when planning this type of ticket.

FREE STOPOVERS

If your flight to South America connects through Miami, Los Angeles, Houston or other cities in the US, or through cities in Mexico or Central America, you may be able to arrange a free stopover. This would allow

you to spend some time in these countries before continuing south. Ask your travel agent about this possibility.

From Australia

Excursion fares from Australia to South America aren't cheap. The most direct routes on Qantas and its partners are from Sydney to Santiago or Buenos Aires. Fares are usually the same from Melbourne, Sydney or Brisbane, but from other Australian cities you may have to add the cost of getting to Sydney.

In terms of airfare only, it may be marginally cheaper to go to South America via the US, but even a day in Los Angeles would cost more than the savings in airfares, so it's not good value unless you want to visit the US anyway. It may be worth it for travel to Colombia or Venezuela, but not for cities further south.

The best RTW options are probably those with Aerolíneas Argentinas combined with other airlines, including Air New Zealand, British Airways, Iberia, Singapore Airlines, Thai Airways or KLM. The Qantas version of a RTW ticket is its 'Oneworld Explorer' fare, which allows you to visit four to six continents.

Some of the cheapest tickets are available through **STA Travel** (☎ 1300-733-035; www.statravel.com.au) and **Flight Centre** (☎ 133-133; www.flightcentre.com.au), both of which have dozens of offices in the country. For online bookings, try www.travel.com.au.

From Central America

Flights from Central America are usually subject to high tax, and discounted flights are almost unobtainable. Nevertheless, it's cheaper, easier and safer to fly between Central and South America than to go overland.

You must have an onward ticket to enter Colombia, and airlines in Panama and Costa Rica are unlikely to sell you a one-way ticket to Colombia unless you already have an onward ticket or are willing to buy a round-trip flight. Venezuela and Brazil also demand an onward ticket. If you have to purchase a round-trip ticket, check whether the airline will give you a refund for unused portions of the ticket. One way to avoid the onward or return ticket requirement is to fly from Central America to Ecuador or Peru.

For other countries that require onward tickets, see p1073.

VIA ISLA DE SAN ANDRÉS

Copa Airlines (www.copaair.com) flies from Panama City to the Colombian island of Isla de San Andrés, off the coast of Nicaragua. One-way fares at press time were about US\$203 (though they drop as low as US\$115 if you purchase online). From San Andrés, you can continue on a domestic Colombian flight to Bogotá, Cali, Cartagena or Medellín, paying anywhere between US\$125 and US\$150 for the flight. For more information on Isla de San Andrés, see p590.

FROM COSTA RICA

Flights to Quito from Costa Rica are generally about US\$100 more than from Panama. The Costa Rican student organization **OTEC** (www.turismojuven.com) offers some cheap tickets.

FROM PANAMA

There are direct flights from Panama City to Bogotá, Cartagena and Medellín. The Colombian airline **Avianca** (www.avianca.com) and the Panamanian carrier **Copa** (www.copaair.com) generally offer the cheapest deals to these places. Colombia officially requires proof of onward travel, but Copa offices in Cartagena, Barranquilla and Medellín should refund unused returns; check in advance. Refunds, in Colombian currency only, take up to four days. You can also fly from Panama City to Quito, Ecuador.

From Continental Europe

The best places in Europe for cheap airfares are 'student' travel agencies (you don't have to be a student to use them) in Amsterdam, Berlin, Brussels, Frankfurt and Paris, and sometimes in Athens. If airfares are expensive where you live, try contacting a London agent, who may be able to issue an electronic ticket or a paper ticket by mail. The cheapest destinations in South America are generally Caracas, Buenos Aires and possibly Rio de Janeiro, or Recife, Brazil. High-season months are from early June to early September, and mid-December to mid-January. The cheapest flights from Europe are typically charters, usually with fixed dates for both outward and return flights.

The following travel agencies are good possibilities for bargain fares from Continental Europe.

FRANCE

AnyWay (☎ 0892-893-892; www.anyway.fr)

Lastminute (☎ 0892-705-000; www.lastminute.fr)

Nouvelles Frontières (☎ 0825-000-747; www.nouvelles-frontieres.fr)

OTU Voyages (www.otu.fr) This agency specializes in student and youth travelers.

Voyageurs du Monde (☎ 01-40-15-11-15; www.vdm.com)

GERMANY

Expedia (www.expedia.de)

Just Travel (☎ 089-747-3330; www.justtravel.de)

Lastminute (☎ 01805-284-366; www.lastminute.de)

STA Travel (☎ 01805-456-422; www.statravel.de)

For travelers under the age of 26.

ITALY

One recommended agency is **CTS Viaggi** (☎ 06-462-0431; www.cts.it), which specializes in student and youth travel.

NETHERLANDS

Airfair (☎ 020-620-5121; www.airfair.nl)

NBBS Reizen (☎ 0900-10-20-300; www.nbbs.nl)

Student agency.

From New Zealand

The two chief options are to fly **Aerolíneas Argentinas** (☎ 09-379-3675; www.aerolineas.com.ar) from Auckland to Buenos Aires (with connections to neighboring countries) or to fly with **Air New Zealand** (☎ 0800-737-000; www.airnz.co.nz) from Auckland to Papeete, Tahiti, connecting with a **LanChile** (in Auckland ☎ 09-977-2233, 912-7435; www.lanchile.com) flight via Easter Island to Santiago. Onward tickets, eg to Lima, Rio de Janeiro, Guayaquil, Bogotá or Caracas, are much cheaper if purchased in conjunction with a long-haul flight from the same carrier. A 'Visit South America' fare, valid for three months, allows you two stops in South America plus one in the US, then returns to Auckland. Various open-jaw options are possible, and you can make the trip in either direction.

Both **Flight Centre** (☎ 0800-243-544; www.flightcentre.co.nz) and **STA Travel** (☎ 0508-782-872; www.statravel.co.nz) have branches throughout the country. For online bookings try www.travel.co.nz.

From the UK

Fares from London are some of the cheapest in Europe, with the cheapest destinations in South America generally including Buenos Aires, Caracas, Bogotá and Sao Paulo. Advertisements for many travel agencies appear

in the travel pages of the weekend broadsheet newspapers, in *Time Out*, the *Evening Standard* and in the free online magazine **TNT** (www.tntmagazine.com).

Some London agencies specialize in South American travel. One very good agency is **Journey Latin America** (JLA; www.journeylatinamerica.co.uk; London ☎ 020-8747-3108; Manchester ☎ 0161-832-1441). JLA is very well informed about South American destinations, has a good range of air passes and can issue tickets from South America to London and deliver them to any of the main South American cities (this can be much cheaper than buying the same ticket in South America).

Other places to try are **South American Experience** (☎ 020-7976-5511; www.southamericanexperience.co.uk) and **Austral Tours** (☎ 020-7233-5384; www.latinamerica.co.uk).

Other recommended travel agencies in the UK include the following:

Bridge the World (☎ 0870-444-7474; www.b-t-w.co.uk)

Flightbookers (☎ 0870-814-4001; www.ebookers.com)

Flight Centre (☎ 0870-890-8099; http://flightcentre.co.uk)

North-South Travel (☎ 01245-608-291; www.northsouthtravel.co.uk) North-South Travel donate part of their profit to projects in the developing world.

Quest Travel (☎ 0870-442-3542; www.questtravel.com)

STA Travel (☎ 0870-160-0599; www.statravel.co.uk)
For travelers under the age of 26.

Trailfinders (www.trailfinders.co.uk)

Travel Bag (☎ 0870-890-1456; www.travelbag.co.uk)

From the USA & Canada

Major gateways are Los Angeles, Miami and New York; Miami is usually cheapest. Newark, New Jersey; Washington, DC; and Dallas and Houston, Texas, also have direct connections to South America. As a general rule, Caracas and Lima are probably the cheapest South American destinations, while Buenos Aires, Santiago and La Paz are the most expensive.

Inexpensive tickets from North America usually have restrictions; often there's a two-week advance-purchase requirement, and usually you must stay at least one week and no more than three months (prices often double for longer periods). High season for most fares is from early June to early September, and mid-December to mid-January. Look in

major newspapers and alternative weeklies for sample fares and deals.

Travel agencies known as ‘consolidators’ typically have the best deals. They buy tickets in bulk, then discount them to their customers, or sell ‘fill-up fares,’ which can be even cheaper (with additional restrictions). Look for agencies that specialize in South American travel, such as **eXito** (☎ 800-655-4053, 925-952-9322; www.exitotravel.com). eXito has a very knowledgeable staff (most of them have lived in Latin America), offers great deals and is excellent for travelers with special interests.

The largest student travel company in the USA is **STA Travel** (☎ 1-800-777-0112; www.statravel.com). Its US offices are listed on its website, or you can book tickets online. The **Adventure Travel Company** (www.atcadventure.com) deals with the general public as much as it does with students and offers some excellent prices. The agency has offices in the US and Canada.

Most flights from Canada involve connecting via one of the US gateways. **Travel Cuts** (☎ 800-667-2887; www.travelcuts.com) is Canada’s national student travel agency. For online bookings try www.expedia.ca and www.travelocity.ca.

For US bookings online, try the following:

Cheap Tickets (www.cheaptickets.com)

Expedia (www.expedia.com)

Lowestfare.com (www.lowestfare.com)

Orbitz (www.orbitz.com)

Travelocity (www.travelocity.com)

STA Travel (www.sta.com) Best for travelers under the age of 26.

For occasional steals, try an air-ticket auction site such as **Priceline.com** (www.priceline.com) or **SkyAuction.com** (www.skyauction.com), where you bid on your own fare.

LAND

From North America, you can journey overland only as far south as Panama. There is no road connection onward to Colombia: the Carretera Panamericana (Pan-American Hwy) ends in the vast wilderness of the Darién Province, in southeast Panama. This roadless area between Central and South America is called the **Darién Gap**. In the past it has been difficult, but possible, to trek across the gap with the help of local guides, but since around 1998 it has been prohibitively dangerous, especially on the Colombian side. The region is effectively controlled by guerrillas and is positively unsafe.

SEA

A few cruise ships from Europe and the US call on South American ports, but they are much more expensive than any air ticket. Some cargo ships from Houston, New Orleans, Hamburg and Amsterdam will take a lim-

BORDER CROSSINGS

There are ample border crossings in South America, so you generally never have to travel too far out of your way to get where you eventually want to go. Between countries like Argentina and Chile – and especially throughout Patagonia – there are loads of border crossings. Most crossings are by road (or bridge), but there are many crossings that involve boat travel (such as across the Río de la Plata between Buenos Aires and Uruguay; several lake crossings between Argentina and Chile, and across Lake Titicaca between Bolivia and Peru).

With the influx of footloose foreigners in the region, border police are used to backpackers turning up at their often isolated corner of the globe. That said, crossing is always, always easier if you appear at least somewhat kempt, treat the guards with respect, and make an attempt at Spanish or Portuguese. If, on the off chance, you encounter an officer who tries to extract a few pesos from you before allowing you through (it does happen occasionally), maintain your composure. If the amount is small (and it generally is), it’s probably not worth your trouble trying to fight it. Just consider it fodder for your stories. Generally, border police are courteous and compared to, say, the border police in the United States, very easy going.

Detailed information on border crossings is provided in local sections throughout this book; major crossings are listed at the start of each chapter. Also see Visas in the South America Directory and in individual chapter directories for specific requirements.

ited number of passengers to South American ports, but they are also expensive.

Some small cargo ships sail between Colón, Panama and the Colombian port of Barranquilla, but many of them are involved in carrying contraband and may be too shady for comfort. Nevertheless, some of these ships will take paying passengers, and some will also take motorcycles and even cars. Prices are very negotiable, maybe US\$50 for a passenger, US\$150 to US\$200 for a motorcycle. For more information on shipping a vehicle, see p1085.

One of the most popular modes of travel between Central and South America is by crewing (or otherwise securing passage) on a private sailboat between Cartagena and the San Blas islands, with some boats continuing to Colón. The typical passage takes four to six days and costs US\$220 to US\$270. The best place for up-to-date information regarding schedules and available berths is at Hotel Holiday and Casa Viena in Cartagena (see p585).

Officially, both Panama and Colombia require an onward or return ticket as a condition of entry. This may not be enforced in Colombia, but it's wise to get a ticket anyway, or have plenty of money and a plausible itinerary. Panama requires a visa or tourist card, an onward ticket and sufficient funds, and has been known to turn back arrivals who don't meet these requirements. The Panamanian consulate in Cartagena is reportedly helpful.

GETTING AROUND

Half the fun of South America is getting around. Whether aboard a rickety *chiva* (open-sided bus) in Ecuador, a motorized canoe in the Amazon, a luxury bus in Argentina or a small aircraft humming over the Andes, transport on this continent can be just plain fun. It can also be grueling, stomach-turning and, at times, scary as hell. But one thing it never is, is lacking. In almost all of South America, affordable public transport is everywhere.

AIR

There is an extensive network of domestic flights, with refreshingly low price tags, especially in the Andean countries (Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru). After 18-hour bus rides

across 350km of mountainous terrain on atrocious roads, you may decide, as many travelers do, to take the occasional flight.

There are drawbacks to flying, however. Airports are often far from city centers, and public buses don't run all the time, so you may end up spending a bit on taxis (it's usually easier to find a cheap taxi *to* an airport than *from* one). Airport taxes also add to the cost of air travel; they are usually higher for international departures. If safety concerns you, check out the 'Fatal Events by Airline' feature at **AirSafe.com** (www.airsafe.com).

In some areas, planes don't depart on time. Avoid scheduling a domestic flight with a close connection for an international flight or vice versa. Many a traveler has been stranded after setting too tight an itinerary that hinges on their international flight arriving on time and connecting with a domestic leg to a far-flung outpost. Reconfirm all flights 48 hours before departure and turn up at the airport at least an hour before flight time (two to three hours for international flights).

Flights from North America and Europe may permit stopovers on the way to the destination city. It's worth considering this when shopping for an international flight, as it can effectively give you a free air connection within South America. Onward connections in conjunction with an international flight can also be a cheap way to get to another South American city (for more, see p1077).

Air Passes

Air passes offer a number of flights within a country or region, for a specified period, at a fixed total price. Passes offer an economical way to cover long distances if your time is limited, but they have shortcomings. Some passes are irritatingly inflexible: once you start using the pass, you're locked into a schedule and can't change it without paying a penalty. The validity period can be restrictive and certain passes require that you enter the country on an international flight – you can't travel overland to the country and then start flying around with an air pass. Citizens of some countries are not eligible for certain air passes and on and on. For a concise overview of the various passes and their minutiae, see the air passes pages on the **Last Frontiers** (www.lastfrontiers.co.uk/airpass.htm) or **eXito** (www.exitotravel.com) websites.

MULTICOUNTRY AIR PASSES

A few decent South America air passes exist and can save you a bit of money, provided you can deal with a fixed itinerary. One such pass is the Mercosur Pass. This mileage-based pass offered by eight South American airlines (and sold by most travel agents) allows travelers to fly to cities in Argentina, Brazil, Chile (excluding Easter Island), Paraguay and Uruguay on the major airlines of those countries. The flights must be completed over a minimum of seven days and a maximum of 30 days, and there's a maximum of four flights in any country, eight flights in all (nine, if Iguazú Falls is on your itinerary). If you organize it well, this can be cheaper than some domestic air passes. The cost is based on the number of standard air miles (not kilometers) you want to cover; prices range from US\$225 to US\$870, for 1200 to 7200 miles.

The Visit South America air pass offered by Oneworld (p1077) allows stops in 34 cities in 10 South American countries. If Central America figures into your travel, and you're flying originally from the US, ask your travel agent about the Copa Pass, offered by Copa Airlines in partnership with Continental. With this pass you can fly from certain US cities to, say, Guatemala City and/or San José, Costa Rica, and on to one or more South American cities and return from South America.

SINGLE-COUNTRY AIR PASSES

Most air passes are only good within one country and are usually purchased in combination with a return ticket to that country. In addition, most air passes must be purchased outside the destination country; check with a travel agent. Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia and Peru all offer domestic air passes; for more details, see Getting Around in the Transportation section of each country chapter.

Sample Airfares

Unless noted otherwise, the following chart shows sample mid-season, one-way airfares, quoted directly by airlines for purchase in South America. With some savvy you may find better fares. Sometimes, purchasing an *ida y vuelta* (return-trip) ticket is cheaper than buying a one-way ticket; be sure to ask.

Origin	Destination	Cost (US\$)
Asunción	Buenos Aires	195-210
Bogotá	Quito	206
Buenos Aires	La Paz	160-285
Buenos Aires	Santiago	240-325
Buenos Aires	Ushuaia	103-150
Guayaquil	Galápagos Islands	300/344 (low/high season, round-trip)
Guayaquil	Lima	265-300
Lima	La Paz	195
Punta Arenas	Falkland Islands	500-580 (round-trip)
Punta Arenas	Santiago	400
Quito	Galápagos Islands	344/390 (low/high season, round-trip)
Rio de Janeiro	Manaus	300-520
Rio de Janeiro	Montevideo	250-350
Rio de Janeiro	Santa Cruz, Bolivia	240-325
Salvador	Rio de Janeiro	140
Santa Cruz, Bolivia	Florianópolis	450
Santiago	Easter Island	665 (round-trip)
Santiago	La Paz	355
Santiago	Lima	410

BICYCLE

Cycling South America is a challenging yet wonderful – and potentially inexpensive – alternative to public transport. While better roads in Argentina and Chile make the Cono Sur (Southern Cone; a collective term for Argentina, Chile, Uruguay and parts of Brazil and Paraguay) countries especially attractive, the entire continent is manageable by bike, or – more precisely – by mountain bike. Touring bikes are suitable for paved roads, but only a *todo terreno* (mountain bike) allows you to tackle the spectacular back roads (and often main roads!) of the Andes.

There are no multicountry bike lanes or designated routes. Mountain bikers have cycled the length of Brazil's Trans-Amazon Hwy and plenty of adventurous cyclists have made the transcontinental journey from North to South America. As for road rules, forget it – except for the logical rule of riding with traffic on the right-hand side of the road, there are none. Hunt down good maps that show side roads, as you'll have the enviable ability to get off the beaten track at will.

Bring your own bicycle since locally manufactured ones are less dependable and

imported bikes are outrageously expensive. Bicycle mechanics are common even in small towns, but will almost invariably lack the parts you'll need. Before setting out, learn bicycle mechanics and purchase spares for the pieces most likely to fail. A basic road kit will include extra spokes and a spoke wrench, a tire patch kit, a chain punch, inner tubes, spare cables and a cycling-specific multitool. Some folks box up spare tires, leave them with a family member back home and have them shipped to South America when they need them.

Drawbacks to cycling include the weather (rain in Brazil or wind in Patagonia can slow your progress to a crawl), high altitude in the Andes, poor roads and reckless drivers. Motorists throughout South America often drive with total disregard for anyone but themselves, thus becoming the most serious hazard for cyclists. Safety equipment such as reflectors, mirrors and a helmet are highly recommended. Security is another issue: always take your panniers with you, pay someone to watch your bike while you sightsee and bring your bike into your hotel room overnight.

Before you fly, remember to check your airline's baggage requirements; if you don't box your bike up correctly you may be required to pay as much as US\$100 each way. If you do box it up correctly, you can often check it free of charge.

Although it's well over a decade old, Walter Sienko's *Latin America by Bike: A Complete Touring Guide (By Bike)* makes for an informative pretrip read. For tips on packing, shipping and flying with a bike, check out www.bikeaccess.net. For loads of tips and such from others who have done it, check out **South America Bicycle Touring Links** (www.geocities.com/TheTropics/Island/6810/). Also see p1058 for more information.

BOAT

From cruises through the mystical fjords of Chilean Patagonia to riverboat chugs up the mighty Amazon to outboard canoe travel in the coastal mangroves of Ecuador, South America offers ample opportunity to travel by boat. Safety is generally not an issue, especially for the established ferry and cruise operators in Chile and Argentina. There have been a couple of recent problems with tourist boats in the Galápagos (including one that sank in 2005), so don't scrimp if you don't have to. Travel by outboard canoe and other small craft is generally safe.

Lake Crossings

There are outstanding (but expensive) lake excursions throughout southern Chile and Argentina, as well as on Lake Titicaca, in and between Bolivia and Peru. For details, see the individual country chapters. Some of the most popular are:

- Copacabana (Bolivia) to Lake Titicaca islands of Isla del Sol and Isla de la Luna.
- Lago General Carrera (Chile) to Chile Chico and Puerto Ingeniero Ibáñez (Chile)
- Puerto Montt and Puerto Varas (Chile) to Bariloche (Argentina)
- Puno (Peru) to the Lake Titicaca islands

Riverboat

Long-distance travel on major rivers such as the Orinoco or Amazon is possible, but you'll have a more idyllic time on one of the smaller rivers such as the Mamoré or Beni, where boats hug the shore and you can see and hear the wildlife. On the Amazon, you rarely even see the shore. The river is also densely settled in its lower reaches, and its upper reaches have fewer passenger boats than in the past. Other river journeys include the Río Paraguay from Asunción (Paraguay) to Brazil, or the Río Napo from Coca, Ecuador to Perú.

Riverboats vary greatly in size and standards, so check the vessel before buying a ticket and shop around. Hammock space on the slow boat between Manaus and Belém, Brazil, for example, costs between US\$70 and US\$110, including food; from Trinidad to Guayaramerín, Bolivia (three to four days), it costs US\$30 to US\$35. When you pay the fare, get a ticket with all the details on it. Downriver travel is faster than upriver, but boats going upriver travel closer to the shore and offer more interesting scenery. The time taken between ports is unpredictable, so river travel is best for those with an open schedule.

Food is usually included in ticket prices and means lots of rice and beans and perhaps some meat, but bring bottled water, fruit and snacks as a supplement. The evening meal on the first night of a trip is not usually included. Drinks and extra food are generally sold on board, but at high prices. Bring some spare cash and insect repellent.

Unless you have cabin space, you'll need a hammock and rope to sling it. It can get windy and cool at night, so a sleeping bag is recommended. There are usually two classes

of hammock space, with space on the upper deck costing slightly more; it's cooler there and worth the extra money. Be on the boat at least eight hours prior to departure to get a good hammock space away from engine noise and toilet odors.

Overcrowding and theft on boats are common complaints. Don't allow your baggage to be stored in an insecure locker; bring your own padlock. Don't entrust your bag to any boat officials unless you are quite certain about their status – bogus officials have been reported.

For more tips on riverboat travel see p379.

Sea Trips

The best-known sea trip, and a glorious one at that, is the **Navimag** (in Chile ☎ 02-442-3120; www.navimag.com) ferry ride down the Chilean coast, from Puerto Montt to Puerto Natales (see p418 and p503). Short boat rides in some countries take you to islands not far from the mainland, including Ilha Grande and Ilha de Santa Catarina in Brazil, Isla Grande de Chiloé in Chile and Isla Grande de Tierra del Fuego in Argentina. More distant islands are usually reached by air. In parts of coastal Ecuador, outboard canoes act as public transport in through the mangroves.

BUS

If there's one form of transport in South America that's guaranteed to give you fodder for your travel tales, it's the bus. Whether you're barreling down a treacherous Andean road in a bus full of chickens in Ecuador, or relaxing in a reclining leather chair sipping sparkling wine with dinner on an Argentine long-hauler, you will rarely be short on entertainment. In general, bus transport is well developed throughout the continent – you will rarely find a town that you can't reach by bus. Note that road conditions, bus quality and driver professionalism, however, vary widely.

Highland Peru, Bolivia and Ecuador have some of the worst roads, and bad stretches can be found in parts of Colombia and the Brazilian Amazon. Much depends on the season: vast deserts of red dust in the dry season become oceans of mud in the rainy season. In Argentina, Uruguay, coastal and southern Brazil, and most of Venezuela, roads are generally better. Chile and much of Argentina have some of the best-maintained roads and

most comfortable and reliable bus services in South America.

Most major cities and towns have a *terminal de autobuses* or *terminal de omnibus* (long-distance bus terminal); in Brazil, it's called a *rodoviária*, and in Ecuador it's a *terminal terrestre*. Often, terminals are on the outskirts of town, and you'll need a local bus or taxi to reach it. The biggest and best terminals have restaurants, shops, showers and other services, and the surrounding area is often a good (but frequently ugly) place to look for cheap sleeps and eats. Village 'terminals' in rural areas often amount to dirt lots flanked by dilapidated metal hulks called 'buses' and men hawking various destinations to passersby; listen for your town of choice.

Some cities have several terminals, each serving a different route. Sometimes each bus company has its own terminal, which is particularly inconvenient. This is most common in Colombia, Ecuador and Peru, particularly in smaller towns.

Classes

Especially in the Andean countries, buses may be stripped nearly bare, tires are often treadless, and rock-hard suspension ensures every bump is transmitted directly to your ass before shooting up your spine, especially if you're sitting at the back of the bus. After all seats are taken, the aisle is packed beyond capacity, and the roof is loaded with cargo to at least half the height of the bus, topped by the occasional goat or pig. You may have serious doubts about ever arriving at your destination, but the buses usually make it. Except for long-distance routes, different classes often don't exist; you ride what's available.

At the other extreme, you'll find luxurious coaches in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Uruguay, Venezuela and even Bolivia along main routes. The most expensive buses usually feature fully reclining seats, and meal, beverage and movie services. Different classes are called by a variety of names, depending on the country; for more information see each country's individual Transportation sections. In Argentina, Brazil and Chile, deluxe sleeper buses, called *coche cama* (literally 'bed bus'), are available for most long-distance routes.

Costs

In the Andean countries, bus rides generally add up to about US\$1 per hour of travel.

When better services (such as 1st class or *coche cama*) are offered, they can cost double the fare of a regular bus. Still, overnights negate the need for a hotel room, thereby saving you money.

Reservations

It's always wise to purchase your ticket in advance if you're traveling during peak holiday seasons (January through March in the Southern Cone; and around Easter week and during holiday weekends everywhere). At best, bus companies will have ticket offices at central terminals and information boards showing routes, departure times and fares. Seats will be numbered and booked in advance. In places where tickets are not sold in advance, showing up an hour or so before your departure will usually guarantee you a seat.

Safety

Anyone who has done their share of traveling in South America can tell you stories of horrifying bus rides at the mercy of crazed drivers. In the Andean countries, where roads are bad and machismo gets played out on the road, these stories surface more often. And there are *occasionally* accidents. But remember this: in countries where the vast majority of people travel by bus, there are bound to be more bus wrecks. You don't see guidebook warnings about automobiles in the US, despite the fact that far more people die in cars there than die in buses in South America. Choosing more expensive buses is no guarantee against accidents; several high-profile, recent crashes in Chile and Argentina involved established companies. Some roads are notoriously dangerous (the La Paz–Coroico road in Bolivia, see the boxed text on p202, springs to mind) and, if you're worried, you can probably trim your risks by avoiding them. Or do what most travelers do: sit back and enjoy the ride.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Driving around South America can be mentally taxing and at times risky, but a car allows you to explore out-of-the-way places – especially parks – that are totally inaccessible by public transport. In places like Patagonia and other parts of Chile and Argentina, a short-term rental car can be well worth the expense. If you're driving your own car, so much the better.

There are some hurdles to driving. First off, you need an International Driving Permit to supplement your license from home (see p1066). Vehicle security can be a problem, most notably in the Andean countries and Brazil. Avoid leaving valuables in your car, and always lock it up. Parking is not always secure or even available; be mindful of where you leave your car, lest it be missing when you return. Contracting a local kid to keep an eye on things works wonders; agree on terms beforehand. Familiarizing yourself with phrases for 'nearest gas,' 'busted fan belt' and the like can mitigate road-trip stress. In the same vein, the more you know about vehicle maintenance and repair, the smoother your travels will be.

South American Explorers (SAE; www.saexplorers.org) sells a very useful *Central/South American Driving Packet*. Also look around online for a copy of Chris Yelland's *Driving through Latin America: USA to Argentina*.

Bring Your Own Vehicle

Shipping your own car or motorcycle to South America involves a lot of money (up to US\$1500 each way from the US) and planning. Shipping arrangements should be made at least a month in advance. Stealing from vehicles being shipped is big business, so remove everything removable (hubcaps, wipers, mirrors), and take everything visible from the interior. Shipping your vehicle in a container is more secure, but more expensive. Shipping a motorcycle can be less costly.

If you're driving from North America, remember there is no road connecting Panama and Colombia, so you'll have to ship your vehicle around the Darién Gap (see Land, p1080 and Car & Motorcycle, p552).

Inspirational **VWVagabonds.com** (www.vwvagabonds.com) is bursting with information on shipping and driving a vehicle to South America.

Hire

Major international rental agencies such as Hertz, Avis and Budget have offices in South American capitals, major cities and at major airports. Local agencies, however, often offer better rates. To rent a car, you must be at least 25 and have a valid driver's license from home and a credit card. If your itinerary calls for crossing borders, know that some rental agencies restrict or forbid this; ask before renting.

WORDS FROM BEHIND THE WHEEL

Don and Kim Greene have driven over 24,000km in South America and are still rolling. Their journey is part of a plan to drive around the world, providing 'virtual' cultural and travel experiences for teachers and students through their World of Wonders Project (see www.questconnect.org). Their vehicle: a medium-duty Cabover Mitsubishi Fuso FG 4x4 truck (known as a Canter outside the US), with a camper they designed and built onto the chassis. With Mexico, Central America and seven South American countries beneath their treads, and a responsible travel spirit in their hearts, Lonely Planet figured they were the perfect folks to ask about driving in South America. Don and Kim are from Tucson, Arizona.

Lonely Planet: How long have you been on the road?

Don & Kim Greene: We started from our base in Prescott, Arizona and have been off and on the road since October, 2004. We travel for eight to 10 weeks at a time and go home for two to three months [leaving the vehicle in South America]. As of May 14, 2006 we have been on the road for 38 weeks.

Has driving allowed you to connect with people differently than traveling by bus?

Our conversations with people are definitely different. They almost always begin with comments about the truck. In Brazil we met a lot of truck drivers because we stayed in *postos* (gas stations) a lot because there weren't very many campgrounds outside the beach areas. The truck drivers often travel with their families, and they have little kitchens attached to the undersides of their trucks. We found we had a lot in common with them as fellow drivers and travelers. We have met a wider variety of people from different socioeconomic levels than we generally do when riding the bus.

What are South American drivers like?

South American drivers get a bad rap, and some of them deserve it. However, once you get used to their aggressive driving, you learn to go with the flow and know what to expect. In Venezuela, however, the red light as merely a suggestion for stopping is pretty unusual and a little unnerving. Many drivers are friendly and flash their headlights and/or wave as a way of saying hello. Some drivers have even taken photos as they passed us by! City drivers are basically aggressive and rude, not letting us change lanes without us cutting them off. Try to stay out of cities.

What are the advantages of driving around South America?

The biggest advantage has to be the convenience of coming and going when you want. We can sleep in if we feel like it or leave immediately without having to wait several days for a bus (or train). We can also stop anywhere along the road if we see something interesting.

What about disadvantages?

The biggest disadvantage is probably the cost. If we could have stayed in Venezuela (South America's largest oil producer) the whole time, however, cost wouldn't be an issue. The cost of a gallon of diesel there was US8¢ (US2¢ per liter). But in Brazil the cost of fuel was between US\$3.50 and US\$4.00 (US91¢ to US\$1.04 per liter). At 10 miles to the gallon that gets *really* expensive.

What have the border crossings been like?

With only one exception, the border crossings have been very straightforward and easy. Generally we go through immigration first. Then we head to the *aduana* (customs) office to fill out the paperwork to get the truck temporarily imported into the country. We generally receive permission for the vehicle to be in the country for 90 days. The whole process usually takes between 45 minutes to an hour. Holidays and weekends typically take longer. The one difficult time we had involved leaving Argentina during high season. We crossed where there was only a small office and arrived at the same time as several busses. The border personnel were absolutely overwhelmed and the process took about two hours.

Has security been an issue for you?

Security has not been an issue. Everything on the outside is locked and everything on the inside is out of sight. We believe that if the bad guys can't see inside, there is less temptation to break in. When visiting a city, we try to park in parking lots, but most of them are too small for us, so we try to park in busy areas (as long as they aren't too dodgy). We trust our gut instinct.

We've spent the night in campgrounds, gas stations, hotel parking lots, off-road in the middle of nowhere (bush camping) and city streets. When using a city street, we look for some place we think will have low traffic and usually close to a streetlight. We call it 'city camping' and we've never had a problem doing it.

What about cops?

So far in South America we have not been asked for anything other than ID by the police – they have been more curious than anything else. We carry realistic copies of our drivers' licenses together with copies of all of our vehicle documents. We use the copies with the police so that if necessary we can drive off without paying a bribe to retrieve our documents.

Do you have any recommendations for staying safe on the road?

Drive slowly. We also watch other drivers and try to avoid the ones that appear to be driving impaired. We try to drive very defensively and without distractions (like navigating or adjusting the stereo or air-con – that's what the passenger is for). We try to avoid driving in the downtown areas of large cities. We like to park and take mass transit or taxis into town. We very, very rarely drive at night, and only if absolutely necessary.

Due to the Darién Gap, you shipped your vehicle from Central America.**What was this experience like?**

Basically you have two options for shipping a vehicle: Container or RoRo. Container shipping allows you to ship your vehicle in a standard shipping container. This is generally the least expensive way to ship. If lucky, you can hook up with another traveler and ship both vehicles in a large container for less money. Container shipping is also easier as there are many more container ships than RoRo ships.

RoRo means 'Roll on, Roll off.' This vehicle is driven onto and off of the ship. This is necessary when the vehicle is larger than will fit in an 8ft wide, 8ft high container. It is also more expensive.

There are horror stories about vehicles being broken into and stripped of valuables during shipping. The general consensus is to somehow secure the camper from the cab of the vehicle to be sure that no one can rummage in the camper.

It is very helpful to hire a customs broker on both ends of the shipping to assist with exit and entry formalities. Generally these can be done by yourself, it will just take extra time.

Do you have any advice for would-be drivers?

If at all possible, drive a newer vehicle. Not having to worry about breakdowns is really nice. We know a number of other drivers driving old vehicles and they are always needing to do some kind of maintenance. Try renting a vehicle before deciding to buy/build an expedition vehicle. Some countries even have campers for rent. If buying in another country, check the regulations like obtaining title and insurance, which are different from country to country.

What about four-wheel drive versus two-wheel drive?

This is really personal preference. Most overlanders drive two-wheel drive vehicles. Being from the American Southwest we believe in the idea of 'self-rescue.' This means that a driver should have everything necessary to rescue their vehicle with them. It won't do any good if you get stuck in mud and the other drivers don't have a towrope to pull you free. Additionally, we like to travel off the beaten path and four-wheel drive gives us the confidence that we can make it back out again.

Any routes drivers' should absolutely not miss?

The Carretera Austral in Chile (see p509), the Lake District in Argentina (see p130), the Gran Sabana in Venezuela (see p1042) and the coastal route north of the Rio San Francisco in Brazil (see p339). We expect to find other such routes as we head north along the Andes.

Rates have come down over the years, and the best prices are found in tourist hot spots, where competition pushes rates down. Generally you'll pay around US\$40 per day, but some companies charge extortionately high rates (up US\$100 per day if you want unlimited kilometers). It's always worth checking, however, and getting a group together will defray costs. If the vehicle enables you to camp out, the saving in accommodations may offset much of the rental cost, especially in Southern Cone countries.

Insurance

Home auto insurance policies generally do not cover you while driving abroad. Throughout South America, if you are in an accident that injures or kills another person, you can be jailed until the case is settled, regardless of culpability. Fender benders are generally dealt with on the spot, without involving the police or insurance agents. When you rent, be certain your contract includes *seguro* (insurance).

Purchase

If you're spending several months in South America, purchasing a car is worth considering. It will be cheaper than hiring if you can resell it at the end of your stay. On the other hand, any used car can be a financial risk, especially on rugged roads, and the bureaucracy involved in purchasing a car can be horrendous.

The best countries in which to purchase cars are Argentina, Brazil and Chile, but, again, expect exasperating bureaucracies. By reputation, Santiago, Chile is the best place to buy a car, and Asunción, Paraguay is the best place to sell one. Be certain of the title; as a foreigner, getting a notarized document authorizing your use of the car is a good idea, since the bureaucracy may take its time transferring the title. Taking a vehicle purchased in South America across international borders may present obstacles.

Officially, you need a *carnet de passage* or a *libreta de pasos por aduana* to cross most land borders in your own vehicle, but you'll probably never have to show these documents. The best source of advice is the national automobile club in the country where you buy the car. In North America, the Canadian Automobile Association may be more helpful in getting a *carnet* than the American Automobile Association.

Road Rules

Except in Guyana and Suriname, South Americans drive on the right-hand side of the road. Road rules are frequently ignored and seldom enforced; conditions can be hazardous; and many drivers, especially in Argentina and Brazil, are very reckless and even willfully dangerous. Driving at night is riskier than the day, due to lower visibility and the preponderance of tired and/or intoxicated nighttime drivers sharing the road.

Road signs can be confusing, misleading or nonexistent – a good sense of humor and patience are key attributes. Honking your horn on blind curves is a simple, effective safety measure; the vehicle coming uphill on a one-way road usually has the right of way. If you're cruising along and see a tree branch or rock in the middle of the road, slow down: this means there's a breakdown, rock slide or some other trouble up ahead. Speed bumps can pop up anywhere, most often smack in the center of town, but sometimes inexplicably in the middle of a highway.

HITCHHIKING

Hitching is never entirely safe in any country. Travelers who decide to hitch should understand they are taking a potentially serious risk. Hitching is less dangerous if you travel in pairs and let someone know where you are planning to go.

Though it is possible to hitch all over South America, free lifts are the rule only in Argentina, Chile, Uruguay and parts of Brazil. Elsewhere, hitching is virtually a form of public transport (especially where buses are infrequent) and drivers expect payment. There are generally fixed fares over certain routes; ask the other passengers what they're paying. It's usually about equal to the bus fare, marginally less in some places. You get better views from the top of a truck, but if you're hitching on the Andean *altiplano* (high plain) or *páramo* (humid, high-altitude grassland), take warm clothing. Once the sun goes down or is obscured by clouds, it gets very cold.

There's no need to wait at the roadside for a lift, unless it happens to be convenient. Almost every town has a central truck park, often around the market. Ask around for a truck going your way and how much it will cost; be there about 30 minutes before the departure time given by the driver. It is often

worth soliciting a ride at *servicentros* (gas/petrol stations) on the outskirts of large cities, where drivers refuel their vehicles.

Online, check out the South America section of **digihitch** (www.digihitch.com).

LOCAL TRANSPORTATION

Local and city bus systems tend to be thorough and reliable throughout South America. Although in many countries you can flag a bus anywhere on its route, you're best off finding the official bus stop. Still, if you can't find the stop, don't hesitate to throw your arm up to stop a bus you know is going your direction. Never hesitate to ask a bus driver which is the right bus to take; most of them are very generous in directing you to the right bus.

As in major cities throughout the world, pickpockets are a problem on crowded buses and subways. If you're on a crowded bus or subway, always watch your back. Avoid crowded public transport when you're loaded down with luggage.

Taxis in most big cities (but definitely not all) have meters. When a taxi has a meter, make sure the driver uses it. When it doesn't, always agree on a fare *before* you get in the cab. In most cities, fares are higher on Sundays and after around 9pm.

TRAIN

Trains are slowly fading from the South American landscape, but several spectacular routes still operate, offering some of the most unforgettable train rides on earth. Other non-touristy trains are often cheaper than buses (even in 1st class) but they're slower. If you're a railway enthusiast, or just a sucker for fun, try the following routes:

Curitiba–Paranaguá (Brazil) Descending steeply to the coastal lowlands, Brazil's best rail journey offers unforgettable views (p318).

Oruro–Uyuni–Calama (Bolivia–Chile) The Oruro–Uyuni run offers great *altiplano* scenery all the way to Uyuni, where a branch line goes southwest to the Chilean border. After a tedious border crossing, there's a dramatic descent to Calama, through wild moonlike landscapes and extinct volcanoes. This is a long, tiresome trip and can get

extremely cold at night. Bundle up and bring along extra food and water (p215).

Oruro–Uyuni–Tupiza–Villazón (Bolivia) The main line from Oruro continues south from Uyuni to Tupiza (another scenic rail trip through gorge country) and on to Villazón at the Argentine border (p215).

Puno–Juliaca–Cuzco (Peru) From the shores of Lake Titicaca and across a 4600m pass, this train runs for group bookings during high season. Departures are unpredictable, but when it does run, it's open to nongroup passengers (p868).

Riobamba–Sibambe (Ecuador) Jostle for a spot on the roof to enjoy the death-defying Nariz del Diablo (Devil's Nose), an exhilarating, steep descent via impossible switchbacks (p687).

Salta–La Polvorilla (Argentina) So what if it's a tourist train? The Tren a las Nubes (Train to the Clouds) negotiates switchbacks, tunnels, spirals and death-defying bridges during its ascent into the Andean *puna* (highlands), taking your brain to the clouds with it (p105).

There are several types of passenger trains in the Andean countries. The *ferrobus* is a relatively fast, diesel-powered single or double car that caters to passengers going from A to B but not to intermediate stations. Meals are often available on board. These are the most expensive trains and can be an excellent value.

The *tren rápido* is more like an ordinary train, pulled by a diesel or steam engine. It is relatively fast, makes few stops and is generally cheaper than a *ferrobus*. Ordinary passenger trains, sometimes called *expresos*, are slower, cheaper and stop at most intermediate stations. There are generally two classes, with 2nd class being very crowded. Lastly, there are *mixtos*, mixed passenger and freight trains; these take everything and everyone, stop at every station and a lot of other places in between, take forever and are dirt cheap.

The few remaining passenger trains in Chile and Argentina are generally more modern, and the salon and Pullman classes are very comfortable and quite inexpensive. The *economía* or *turista* classes are slightly cheaper, while the *cama* (sleeper class) is even more comfortable. Brazil still has a few interesting train trips, but they're quite short.