



# VIVA LATINA

SOUTH AMERICA HAS A THOUSAND WAYS TO SEDUCE VISITORS. **UTE JUNKER** LISTS EIGHT OF THE BEST.

**F**rom the icy beauty of Patagonia to the splendours of Machu Picchu, from spectacular wildlife to world-class wines, South America is a continent with many charms. So where to start your explorations? Ensconced in a high-altitude luxury train, surrounded by colonial grandeur or kicking back amid the grapevines? To help you choose, we have compiled this list of the crème de la crème of the continent's most unforgettable experiences.

## GET ICED IN PATAGONIA

It's no wonder they don't have televisions at Tierra Patagonia in Chile: nothing on the box could compete with the view out the picture windows. Patagonia's dramatic peaks and tranquil lakes are never less than mesmerising, and Tierra's pared-back

Scandi chic interiors are designed not to detract attention from what lies outside.

Not that you will spend too much time in the lodge: any Patagonian adventure is about exploring the great outdoors, and Tierra's range of half-day and full-day excursions includes everything from hikes to horseback rides. Expect plenty of thrilling moments, from encounters with guanacos (a dewy-eyed llama relative) to watching icebergs drift slowly past or condors wheeling around mountain peaks.

From \$US2690 (\$3400) per person twin share for three nights, including accommodation, transfers, meals and beverages, and one all-day or two half-day guided excursions; [tierrahotels.com](http://tierrahotels.com)

## ENJOY A GRAPE ESCAPE

There are more than 900 wineries in Mendoza, Argentina's premier wine region,

but only one place to stay – well, only one that should be on your radar. Cavas Wine Lodge is the perfect romantic retreat. Set amid the vines, each of its secluded villas is rich in creature comforts, from a clawfoot tub to a plunge pool. Our favourite feature: the rooftop terrace with its own fireplace, perfect for a spot of evening stargazing.

If you can tear yourself away from your villa, there are plenty of activities on offer: apart from the obligatory wine tasting (if you don't want to take the car, a horseback option is available), seasonal activities include rafting and skiing. Of course, you may decide to stay on property and enjoy an al fresco cooking class or a session in the Moorish spa, where the vinotherapy treatments range from a malbec scrub to a red wine bath.

From \$US1300 for a Vineyard Villa; [cavaswinelodge.com](http://cavaswinelodge.com)

ABOVE: Tierra Patagonia in Chile's Torres del Paine National Park is all about the great outdoors. BELOW: Vine romance at Cavas Wine Lodge, in Mendoza, Argentina.





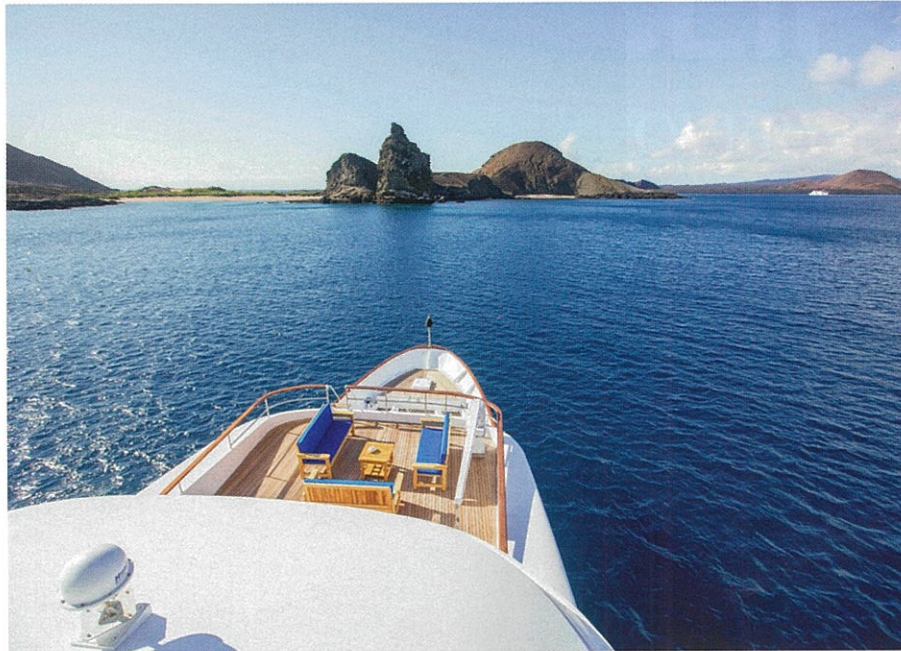
## CRUISE THE GALAPAGOS ON A PRIVATE YACHT

When it comes to wildlife destinations, the Galapagos takes some beating.

This archipelago of 21 islands off the coast of Ecuador is known not just for its biodiversity – many of its 27 reptile species, 29 land birds and 19 seabirds are found nowhere else on earth – but for the fact that the animals are completely unafraid of humans. This is due to the islands' lack of predators, and means you can get truly up-close experiences.

Such an extraordinary destination demands an extraordinary way to explore, which is why you want to charter the M/Y Passion. This elegant 48-metre yacht takes 12 passengers, and has beautiful teak wood decks and marble bathrooms. As well as wildlife walks, passengers can enjoy activities including kayaking, snorkelling and scuba diving.

\$US81,691 for an eight-day itinerary; [visitgalapagos.travel](http://visitgalapagos.travel)



LEFT: Explore the wonders of the Galapagos archipelago by private yacht. BELOW: The Aria Amazon cruises the world's mightiest river. BELOW LEFT: The Palacio de Sal hotel in Bolivia's Salar de Uyuni is constructed from salt.

## SLEEP IN A BOLIVIAN HOTEL MADE OF SALT

In Bolivia's highlands, it's not just the altitude that will make your head spin. Some of South America's most spectacular landscapes are found here, from red lagoons to eerie rock formations.

The winner in the knock-your-socks-off stakes, however, is the salt flats of Salar de Uyuni – a glittering, otherworldly expanse that covers an astonishing 12,000 square kilometres.

Perched on the edge of the flats is the Palacio de Sal, a hotel built entirely of salt. Most of the salt blocks are hidden away behind other surfaces; however, look at the domed ceiling above your bed and you will see exactly how the blocks have been stacked together to construct this unique hotel.

From BOB1428 (\$263) for a suite, including breakfast; [palaciodesal.com.bo](http://palaciodesal.com.bo)



Espeho, where the rustic Silvinha's restaurant offers a lovely al fresco dining experience.

From \$R1600 (\$645) per room per night; [uxua.com](http://uxua.com)

## ENJOY AN AMAZONIAN ADVENTURE

It may be a jungle out there, but Aqua Expeditions isn't letting that cramp its style. Its Amazonian cruiser, the Aria Amazon, is a sleek, sophisticated ship with elegant interiors and cabins with marble bathroom floors and floor-to-ceiling windows. It is also known for its superb food (menus are courtesy of celebrated Lima chef Pedro Miguel Schiaffino) and its intriguing itineraries.

The seven-night cruise explores both of the Amazon's powerful tributaries, the Marañon and the Ucayali, and black-water lakes. From pink dolphins to blue macaws, giant water lilies to three-toed sloths, there are plenty of amazing sights, and kayaking, canoeing and swimming are all on the itinerary.

From \$US8505; [aquapexpeditions.com](http://aquapexpeditions.com)

## KICK BACK IN CARTAGENA

Colombia's most beautiful city never disappoints. Perched on the edge of the Caribbean, Cartagena's beautifully preserved old town is all cobbled streets, sunny squares and cascading bougainvillea, sheltered behind 13 kilometres of ancient walls.

To make the most of your stay, check into the **Casa San Agustin**, a colonial charmer rich

in beguiling detail, including hand-painted bathroom tiles and centuries-old frescoes. If you're feeling active, grab one of the hotel bikes and go exploring. If you're feeling languid, lounge by the pool for a while, then head to the lovely Aurrum Spa for one of the treatments that draw on local ingredients such as coffee and tobacco.

\$US350 including daily breakfast; [hotelcasasanagustin.com](http://hotelcasasanagustin.com)

## RIDE THE RAILS IN PERU

Discover Peru's most famous sights aboard the Belmond Andean Explorer, the newest luxury train from the company once known as Orient-Express. Your journey starts at Arequipa and includes a day at Lake Titicaca, the world's highest navigable lake, before finishing at Cusco, the former Inca capital that is the jumping-off point for exploring the Sacred Valley and Machu Picchu.

Serious train buffs may recognise the sleek carriages: they once worked the Great South Pacific Express route, the now-defunct luxury train that travelled between Sydney and Kuranda. The pick of the lodgings are the double cabins, which measure a roomy 13 square metres. And the best is yet to come: in March 2018, a separate spa car will be added.

The two-night Andean Plains & Islands of Discovery itinerary costs \$US1755 per person twin share for a deluxe double-bed cabin; [belmond.com](http://belmond.com) ☒

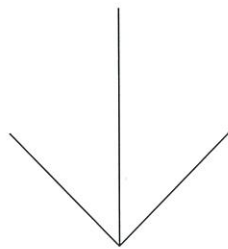
## DISCOVER REMOTE BRAZILIAN BEACHES

Uxua Casa Hotel in Brazil's Bahia region is not your everyday beach getaway. For one thing, it's a 10-minute walk from the Atlantic Ocean. That hasn't stopped Brazil's chic set, along with international celebrities such as Diane von Furstenberg and Beyonce, from flocking here for some downtime.

Why? There's the location. The sleepy fishing village of Trancoso, an hour's drive from the nearest airport (charter a chopper to cut your travel time), is a picture-perfect collection of colourfully painted shacks. Ten of these shacks have been reinvented – by a former creative director of Diesel, no less – as irresistible havens of laid-back luxury.

There is the spa, where the treatments use indigenous ingredients such as resin from the native almesca trees.

Then there are the beaches themselves. The nearest one is home to Uxua's inviting beach club; however, it's worth hiring a boat to explore some of the neighbouring beaches, including the tranquil Praia do



RIGHT: Shack up in great style at Uxua Casa Hotel on Brazil's Bahia coast. FAR RIGHT: The Belmond Andean Explorer is a peak rail experience.

