

# Reef and Rainforest Tours



## The Orcas of Patagonia's Wildlife Coast

Set Departures - Led by Local Naturalist Guides

1 – 14 March 2012

4 – 17 March 2013

# The Orcas of Patagonia's Wildlife Coast

## Set Departures - Led by Local Naturalist Guides

Along Patagonia's vast Atlantic shoreline several ocean currents mix, and thanks to the relatively low traffic and fishing activity the sea is still rich in plankton, seaweed, fish and jellyfish. This in turn attracts large populations of marine mammals and large populations of sea birds. Here can be found various species of dolphins, elephant seals, sealions, magellanic penguins, and at Punta Norte on the Valdes Peninsula, the only location in the world where orcas use beach stranding as a hunting technique.

After enjoying a tour of Buenos Aires three nights are spent on the Valdes Peninsula at Estancia La Ernestina with Juan Copello, the owner, host and guide. Juan has dedicated his life to orca watching and at this time of year his only focus is the orcas so guests need to adapt their day around this! Whilst other visitors to the Valdes Peninsula can watch out for orcas from the cliffs, only guests staying at La Ernestina are permitted on the beach.

From the Valdes Peninsula the tour continues southwards along the Patagonian coast with three nights at El Pedral Lodge and the chance to see elephant seals, sealions, a small colony of Magellanic penguins, possible orca sightings, and a variety of Steppe fauna.

After a boat trip to look for striking black and white Commerson's dolphins continue south to Estancia Bahia Bustamante for a three night stay.

Here there is an incredibly rich marine fauna, with around 3,500 sea lions, orcas and dolphins. The coast of Bahia Bustamante and Malaspina Cove also has the greatest diversity of seabirds in all Patagonia, including a Magellanic penguin colony numbering 100,000 individuals, and significant colonies of the blue-eyed cormorant and rock cormorant.



# The Orcas of Patagonia's Wildlife Coast

14 DAYS – LED BY LOCAL NATURALIST GUIDES

## TOUR IN BRIEF

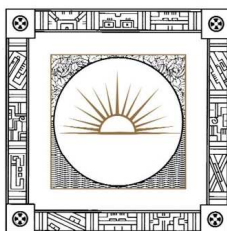
- Day 01: Fly overnight from LONDON HEATHROW to BUENOS AIRES on BRITISH AIRWAYS.
- Day 02: Arrival in BUENOS AIRES. Afternoon city tour. O/n LOI SUITES RECOLETA, BB.
- Day 03: Fly to TRELEW and transfer to the VALDES PENINSULA. Afternoon orca watching. O/n ESTANCIA LA ERNESTINA, FB.
- Day 04: Orca watching. O/n ESTANCIA LA ERNESTINA, FB.
- Day 05: Orca watching. O/n ESTANCIA LA ERNESTINA, FB.
- Day 06: A last opportunity for orca watching before transferring to EL PEDRAL. O/n EL PEDRAL LODGE, FB.
- Day 07: Explore the area looking for orcas, penguins, elephant seals and sea lions. O/n EL PEDRAL LODGE, FB.
- Day 08: Explore the area looking for orcas, penguins, elephant seals and sea lions. O/n EL PEDRAL LODGE, FB.
- Day 09: Transfer to RAWSON. Commerson's dolphin watching boat trip then transfer to BAHIA BUSTAMANTE. O/n ESTANCIA BAHIA BUSTAMANTE, FB.
- Day 10: Explore the area looking for sea lions, dolphins and rich marine bird life including penguins, cormorants, gulls, petrels and skuas. BAHIA BUSTAMANTE, FB.
- Day 11: Explore the area looking for sea lions, dolphins, and rich marine bird life including penguins, cormorants, gulls, petrels and skuas. BAHIA BUSTAMANTE, FB.
- Day 12: Transfer to COMODORO RIVADAVIA and fly to BUENOS AIRES. Evening dinner and tango show. O/n LOI SUITES RECOLETA, BB.
- Day 13: Return to LONDON on early afternoon BRITISH AIRWAYS flight.
- Day 14: Early morning arrival in LONDON HEATHROW.

<b><i>Departure Dates from London</i></b>	<b><i>Adult Price</i></b>	<b><i>Single Supplement</i></b>
<b>01 March 2012</b>	<b>£3,875</b>	<b>£645</b>
<b>04 March 2013</b>	<b>tbc</b>	<b>tbc</b>

Minimum group size 2, max 8 plus naturalist guide.

**NB:** Prices include full board accommodation, Economy flights, transfers, guided activities and the peace of mind of knowing that your payments are fully protected by ATOL. Not included are drinks from the bar, gratuities, and insurance.

**NB:** Extensions are possible to other areas of Argentina such as Iguazu Falls, the Ibera wetlands, or Perito Moreno glacier - please call for details.



## THE ORCAS OF PATAGONIA'S WILDLIFE COAST

### DETAILED ITINERARY

Day 01 Depart LONDON HEATHROW at 2140 on BRITISH AIRWAYS flight BA0245 to BUENOS AIRES.

Day 02 Arrive BUENOS AIRES at 0820. Met on arrival and transfer to the hotel. The rest of the morning is at leisure to relax.

In the afternoon explore the city accompanied by a guide. The tour includes a visit to the blue collar neighbourhood of La Boca where tango originated, San Telmo where the city was founded for the first time, Plaza de Mayo, Casa Rosada and the Metropolitan Cathedral in the central part of the city, and Recoleta with its French architecture and 19<sup>th</sup> century cemetery where Eva Peron is buried.



O/n LOI SUITES RECOLETA, BB. This hotel is well-located in the Recoleta district, just minutes from cafes, restaurants, parks and museums, and literally round the corner from Recoleta cemetery. The 112 suites are equipped with complimentary high speed internet, cable TV, safety deposit box and minibar. Facilities include a small business room with complimentary internet access, lovely winter garden breakfast room with small pool, restaurant, sauna, small gym and massage room.



Day 03 Transfer to BUENOS AIRES DOMESTIC AIRPORT (AEROPARQUE). Depart at 0620 on AEROLINEAS ARGENTINAS flight AR2864 (operated by Austral) to TRELEW, arriving at 0820. Met on arrival and transfer overland to ESTANCIA LA ERNESTINA on the VALDES PENINSULA.

## (2).../ THE ORCAS OF PATAGONIA'S WILDLIFE COAST, MARCH 2012

Designated a World Natural Heritage Site by UNESCO and Natural Protected Area, this 4,000 km<sup>2</sup> promontory protrudes 100 km eastwards into the South Atlantic. Its 400 km shoreline and waters around the Peninsula is home to a variety of marine mammals including the southern right whale who come to mate and calve between May and December, the most northerly colony of southern elephant seals, large breeding colonies of southern sea lions, and orcas.

The Peninsula also has a high diversity of birds and is an important staging site for migratory shorebirds. Over 40,000 Magellanic penguin nests can be found here spread over five different colonies.

There are also abundant terrestrial mammals including large herds of guanaco, lesser rhea and the Patagonian Cavy.

During a three night stay on the Peninsula there will be opportunities to encounter a great variety of the marine and terrestrial fauna, but the main focus will be on watching the orcas.

In the afternoon depart by 4 x 4 towards Punta Norte lighthouse to stand on the beach and wait for the orcas to appear and try to catch seals from the beach. In March and April the sealion pups born in late December are the perfect size for the orcas to eat. This beach which extends for a few kilometres is the only place in the world where orcas use this type of beach stranding attack as a hunting system. Generally it is the females that do the beach stranding attack and if they are successful they share the catch with the orcas that are waiting further from the coast. During March and April there is a 60% chance of seeing orcas, though not necessarily a beach stranding attack.



O/n ESTANCIA LA ERNESTINA, FB. La Ernestina has typical, simple Patagonia architecture with 6 ensuite rooms, and a separate family dining room and library with fireplace. Electricity is provided by a generator which is switched on in the morning and evening. There is no TV, nor cell phone signal.



### (3).../ THE ORCAS OF PATAGONIA'S WILDLIFE COAST, MARCH 2012

Juan Copello, the owner, host and guide of the estancia is the great grandchild of the man who bought the estancia in the early 1900s. He has dedicated his life to orca watching, and participates in programs that study the orca's behaviour. During March and April Juan's only focus is the orcas, and guests need to adapt their day around this! Each day will be spent on the beach and guests must be prepared to move at a moment's notice if Juan spots the orcas first puff. Whilst other visitors to the Valdes Peninsula can watch out for orcas from the cliffs, only guests staying at La Ernestina are permitted on the beach.

Day 04 Spend the day looking for orcas. O/n LA ERNESTINA, FB.

Day 05 Spend the day looking for orcas. O/n LA ERNESTINA, FB.

Day 06 A last morning to look for orcas. After lunch transfer (3 hrs) to EL PEDRAL LODGE.

El Pedral (gravel beach), which gives the lodge its name, extends nine kilometres along the shore. The coastline here is so deep that southern right whales are able to swim very near to the beach (best between August and September).



Orcas are often seen, though their behaviour here is difficult to predict and are best observed from the top of the 60 metre cliffs.

Sealions and elephant seals have established colonies along the coastline, and since 2009 a Magellanic penguin rookery has been steadily growing in numbers to around 800 individuals (between September and April).

During a stay at El Pedral a variety of steppe fauna can also be seen including guanacos, foxes, Patagonian cavy and rheas.

O/n EL PEDRAL LODGE, FB. The lodge occupies a privileged position at the mouth of the Golfo Nuevo and is an ideal location to observe Patagonia's rich marine life outside the Valdes Peninsula. Wendt von Thungen, the manager of the lodge and guide, has lived and worked at El Pedral for



over 30 years. He is extremely passionate and knowledgeable about the wildlife and seems to know every inch of the surrounding area!

#### (4).../ THE ORCAS OF PATAGONIA'S WILDLIFE COAST, MARCH 2012

The main house, constructed in the Norman style, was built in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and is protected by the strong Patagonian winds by a grove of cyprus and tamarisk trees. It contains the kitchen, two cosy lounges and a dining room. There are 8 ensuite bedrooms with gas fires located in a separate structure behind the main house, and a games room and swimming pool to the front. Electricity is provided by wind power with a back up generator. The lodge has two zodiacs for fishing/whale watching trips, kayaks, bikes and can arrange horseriding.

Day 07 Sea conditions permitting spend the morning exploring the coastline by zodiac, or perhaps fishing for silversides, tope sharks, Brazilian sand perch, Patagonian smooth hound, Argentine sea bass and other Atlantic Ocean species.

In the afternoon explore the coastline from the high cliffs that drop straight down to the beach and provide a natural viewpoint of the Atlantic and the entrance to the Golfo Nuevo. These viewpoints afford excellent views of fauna such as elephant seals and sealions, as well as seasonal views of whales, penguins, and orcas. O/n EL PEDRAL LODGE, FB.

Day 08 In the morning drive across the steppe, observing typical fauna such as guanacos, rheas and Patagonian cavy to the start of 'Fossil Canyon'. Follow the canyon on foot to the beach where a large number of fossils from the cenozoic age can be found, including sea urchin fossils (or dollars), and fossil oysters. A hike along the beach leads to an elephant seal colony which can be observed from a few metres... with care!



Return to the lodge and enjoy the rest of the day at leisure. O/n EL PEDRAL LODGE, FB.

Day 09 Transfer (1 hr) to the provincial capital and fishing port of RAWSON. Enjoy a boat trip in the harbour to observe Commerson's dolphins. These striking black and white dolphins are also known as skunk or piebald dolphins.

After lunch transfer (30 mins) to TRELEW to visit the MUSEUM OF PALEONTOLOGY "EGIDIO FERUGLIO" which is located near one of the world's largest and richest fossil deposits. The museum contains more than 1,700 fossil species and 30 dinosaur specimens.

After exploring the museum transfer (3 hrs) southwards to ESTANCIA BAHIA BUSTAMANTE, a small private village located in a 80,000 ha property on the northern shore of the Golfo San Jorge.

(5).../ THE ORCAS OF PATAGONIA'S WILDLIFE COAST, MARCH 2012

O/n ESTANCIA BAHIA BUSTAMANTE, FB. The estancia was built in the 1960s to provide a base for seaweed harvesting and the extraction of colloids the enabled the production of Malvic hair gel.

There are six comfortable houses by the sea with two twin rooms, living room, bathroom and heating. Meals are served in the "Proveduria" in the old Grocery Store, which also contains a small museum, games room, bar and living room with a small library. There are also five simpler 'steppe houses' located on the edge of the village offering accommodation only.



Day 10

Spend the day enjoying the various activities offered by the estancia. These include bird and sea lion watching, a visit to the Petrified Forest, the seaweed industry and archaeological sites, and a visit to a typical Patagonian ranch.

There is an incredibly rich marine fauna in the area, with around 3,500 sea lions, killer whales and dolphins. Right whales and elephant seals can also sometimes be seen on their way to and from the Valdes Peninsula.

The coast of Bahia Bustamante and Malaspina Cove has the greatest diversity of seabirds in all Patagonia, with 21 breeding colonies. There are two endemic species, the Chubut steamer duck and the Olrog's gull, found in large concentrations, a Magellanic penguin colony numbering 100,000 individuals, and significant colonies of the blue-eyed cormorant and rock cormorant.



A variety of Patagonian steppe fauna can also be seen including the Patagonian cavy, lesser rheas and guanacos. O/n ESTANCIA BAHIA BUSTAMANTE, FB.



Day 11

Spend another day enjoying the activities arranged by the estancia. O/n ESTANCIA BAHIA BUSTAMANTE, FB.

(6).../ THE ORCAS OF PATAGONIA'S WILDLIFE COAST, MARCH 2012

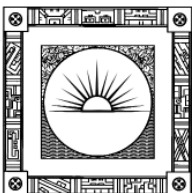
Day 12 After breakfast transfer (2.5 hrs) to COMODORO RIVADAVIA. Depart at 1252 on AEROLINEAS ARGENTINAS to BUENOS AIRES AEROPARQUE, arriving at 1503. Met on arrival and transfer to hotel.

In the evening pick up and transfer to dinner and a tango show. O/n LOI SUITES RECOLETA, BB.

Day 13 In the late morning transfer to BUENOS AIRES INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT. Depart at 1440 on BRITISH AIRWAYS flight BA0244 to LONDON HEATHROW.

Day 14 Arrive LONDON HEATHROW at 0650.

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## IMPORTANT NOTES TO ACCOMPANY THE ABOVE ITINERARY

**NB:** All itineraries are subject to change without notice to take into account possible airline flight schedule changes which can take place before departure date or during the tour, and other operational factors.

**NB:** The quoted price for the above itinerary is based on current exchange rates, airline fares (both international and domestic), fuel surcharges and taxes. These (and other tour costs) may be subject to unanticipated increases beyond our control at short notice, either before or after you have booked the tour, in which case the price would need to be revised accordingly.

**NB:** This tour involves some travel in remote areas. This adds to the adventure and increases the opportunity to enjoy a true wildlife experience. However, due to terrain, weather, road conditions, and other factors beyond our control, some elements of the tour may have to be altered. Times of some activities may need to be changed or even cancelled due to the conditions. If an activity is cancelled it will usually be replaced with an alternative activity that is more appropriate for the conditions. Advance notice will be given for any changes where possible, although at times changes may need to be made whilst the tour is in progress.

**NB:** This tour will not have a specific tour leader throughout, however in each location you will be accompanied by a local naturalist guide.

**NB:** With any trip involving wildlife it is impossible to guarantee a sighting, but each trip is designed around known habitats. Every effort will be made to ensure a sighting, but cannot be held responsible if no sighting is made due to the wildlife itself, weather, or any other elements beyond our control.

**NB:** Prices are based on a specific airlines and specific economy seating classes. Flights are booked on an ad hoc basis and so early booking is recommended to take advantage of the cheapest fare availability. Prices may rise if a more expensive seat class needs to be booked. Please call for information on price variations for using alternative airlines or for seat upgrades.

**NB:** Adequate insurance cover is mandatory. Please supply us with details of your cover.

**NB:** The above itinerary and its quoted price are based on specific hotels and lodges. Should there be insufficient availability at the time of booking, alternative hotels and lodges of a similar standard may have to be booked instead, in which case the itinerary and/or price may change.

**NB:** Inclusive tours and excursions as stated in the itinerary will have been pre-paid. Once full payment has been made and/or clients are actually at their destination, should clients be disinclined to partake of any inclusive tour or excursion, no refunds will be possible.

**NB:** Excursions marked as 'Optional' are not included in the price.

**NB:** Tourist visas are not required for EU residents. Please ensure your passport has six months validity from the date of return.

**NB:** Some service providers may require that guests sign an indemnity waiver form and may refuse services if these forms are not signed. Reef and Rainforest Tours cannot give refunds for services not provided due to a refusal to sign such forms.

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