



Over 50 Years Combined Experience
Providing Incredible Expeditions

The Patagonia Mountain Guide School

Welcome

Welcome to The Patagonia Mountain Guide School. This document is here to give you information about the course, getting here, what to expect, where to stay, what to bring, etc.

We are looking forward to meeting you. In the meantime, we're here to answer any questions you may have. Call or email any time:

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Phone Numbers: +1-763-219-1833 (US)

+44-(0)20-8144-4017 (UK)

+56-9-9519-5328 (Chile, 24 Hour Emergency)

Before You Leave

Fitness

The simple reality is that expedition mountaineering is very challenging. Our expeditions are among the most physically, mentally, and emotionally difficult on the market; You will be living in an extremely remote environment with people you've never met, carrying a heavy pack over rough terrain, undertaking a full regime of interactive classes, all while adjusting to a new environment. It's a very tough lifestyle.

As such, your initial level of fitness will make a huge difference to your enjoyment and ability to get the most out of all facets of the expedition. We very much want you to be successful and learn as much as possible.

Start exercising now. It's not too important what you do, swim, jog, or walk up hills; you want to train for long term endurance and stamina. We recommend before leaving that you take at least a few hikes with a heavy backpack (50 lbs/22kg). With your pack, plan to hike for two to three hours at first (taking breaks every hour or so), increasing to four to six hour hikes as the expedition approaches. Be kind to your knees, and use trekking poles on your training hikes, especially while walking downhill. By mixing regular endurance training with some training hikes, you should be able to quickly adjust to the demands of the expedition. If you have any worries about your health, talk to us and your doctor beforehand.

Learn some Spanish

Most people in Patagonia speak no English. You will get more out of the trip if you are able to learn the basics. Some suggestions:

- *Pimsleur* do a good progressive audio only course so you can learn in the car. Their basic beginner's course is about \$20 US.
- *Rosetta Stone* CD-Rom courses are great but more expensive.
- The *Michel Thomas* course is also recommended and is good for learning grammar.

If you would like to take the opportunity to learn some Spanish while you are in Chile, there are classes available at the Baquedano School in Coyhaique (www.balasc.cl). We've learnt Spanish there with Patricio Guzmán, the school director. You can do a home stay for full immersion or have classes. Pat is a great guy, very entertaining; we recommend him.

Communication

Pre-Expedition: Alaska

Anchorage is a modern, cosmopolitan city, complete with all the usual accoutrements. There is cell phone reception in town with most major carriers, and wifi access at most coffee shops (which seem to be everywhere these days). On the other hand, Alaska, outside of Anchorage, is still very remote. You may get some cell phone reception, but are less likely to find internet access out of town. Plan to be done with all your emails/phone calls by the time the expedition begins.

Pre-Expedition: Patagonia

Coyhaique has plenty of internet cafes and a few cafes with wireless internet access (If you can't live without your laptop). There are also plenty of 'Centro de Llamados' (Call centres) from where you can call home. Our basecamp, located about 15 minutes out of town, has GPRS (not PCS) cell phone reception where you may be able to use a blackberry or similar device for sending emails and making phone calls.

In the Field

We will carry a satellite phone in the field and will be in sporadic contact with our expedition manager. In an emergency, you can be contacted via our email address and the message will be passed onto us in the field as quickly as is possible.

Passport/Visa Requirements

Passports

The Mountain Guide School is a long course and also involves a lot of international travel. Make sure your passport is valid for 1 year beyond the end of the course before you come out. This will help to avoid expiration problems down the road. Also, if you've been anywhere that may cause alarm in the US (the middle east, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, or other "terrorist harbouring" states), just get a new passport before you come and save yourself the hassle.

Alaska

Entry into the United States has become infinitely more complicated in recent years, but entry on a tourist visa (the type you will be entering on, NOT A STUDENT VISA) is still a straight forward process for most nationalities. Citizens of the UK, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand most likely won't even need a visa and can arrive on a visa waiver, given on arrival in the United States. Please check with your nearest US consulate or on the internet for the latest information.

Please remember that you want to enter the USA on a tourist visa, not a student visa (which is a different and much harder-to-get).

To enter into the USA you need a passport valid for **at least 6 months** after your departure date.

Chile

To enter into Chile you need a full valid passport, valid for **at least 6 months** after your departure date. If you hold a UK, US, Canadian, Australian, or New Zealand passport, you don't currently need a visa for Chile. When you arrive you will be issued with a 90 day tourist visa. **There is an arrival tax for some nationalities (up to \$144 USD).**

Please contact your nearest Chilean Embassy to obtain up-to-date relevant visa requirements and information about arrival tax.

Arrival and Departure Information

Arrival in Anchorage, Alaska

Anchorage, Alaska (airport code: ANC) is one of the busiest airports in the world (due to its place as a refuelling station for planes travelling to/from Europe and Asia to the USA). The airport has been newly renovated, and is actually quite nice. Many, many airlines fly in and out of Anchorage, from all over the USA, so check around for the best fares. Companies like Sun Country and Alaska airlines often offer lower priced fares directly on their websites, so it's worth checking out each airlines website.

From the airport, there are inexpensive busses that will take you into town, as well as hotel shuttles and taxis for nearby hotels. Just ask at information about where to catch a bus or taxi. Renting a car in Alaska is very expensive, especially during peak season, so I'd avoid this unless necessary.

Day 1 Schedule

We will pick you up at the Train Station, Located on the corner of 1st Street and C at 8 AM on day 1. Meet us at the antique train on display across from the depot itself. After everyone is picked up, we will be taken to The Mountain Guide School: Alaska camp. At camp, we will have a group brunch/briefing. We will then do a gear check with everyone, do any last minute shopping, and prepare any other last minute details before the expedition begins.

Arrival in Santiago and Getting to Coyhaique

The main international airport for Chile is located in Santiago (airport code: SCL). From Santiago, you want to continue on to Balmaceda (airport code: BBA), the nearest airport to Coyhaique. Good fares can be found from most major cities to Santiago and continuing to Balmaceda at www.lan.com (LAN is the Chilean national airline).

When you arrive in Santiago, you will need to clear immigration and customs before going on to your domestic flight. Just follow the arrows and you won't get lost; many of the signs are in English. If you're unsure of where to go or what to do, many of the airport staff speak at least a little English as well.

Once you've gone through customs, you will walk through a set of double doors that will pour you out into the main international arrival concourse. Here, turn right, run the gauntlet of taxi drivers, and walk about 50 meters to the elevator. Take the elevator up to the third floor. You are now in the domestic check-in terminal. LAN Chile's desk is just to your right. While the domestic baggage allowances are different than international allowances, the airlines will allow you to carry an "international" amount of luggage with you on your domestic flight if you're connecting.

Make sure you have some Chilean Pesos before departing from Santiago. You can obtain Pesos at any of the airport ATMs or with one of the money exchange services located at the airport. There are no facilities for exchanging money at the Balmaceda airport and you will need some Pesos to use the airport shuttle.

There are 4-7 flights daily to Balmaceda. They all stop first in Puerto Montt, so please don't get off the airplane there... When you arrive in Balmaceda, collect your bags from the conveyor belt. If you turn around, there are three companies offering shuttle services into Coyhaique. The shuttle costs 4000 Chilean Pesos (about \$10 US). Any of the three shuttle services is fine. They will give you a little piece of paper, and you will pay when you arrive at your hotel (they will take you right to the hotel). Again, please note that there is no ATM or money exchange at the Balmaceda airport. You will need to bring Chilean Pesos from home or use an ATM or exchange some in the Santiago airport.

You will probably stay the night in one of the many hotels or hostels in Coyhaique to accommodate our early meeting time on day 1. See below for a listing of good hotels/hostels in Coyhaique and Santiago.

Pre/Post Expedition Accommodation

Accommodation: Anchorage

Like most major tourist towns, Anchorage (population 500,000) has many, many options for accommodation. A quick search on google will yield an unending list of choices, so below are just a few that are easily accessible by the bus system:

Alaska House of Jade
907.337.3400
www.alaskahouseofjade.com

Gallery B&B
907.274.2567
Host: Leslie Evans

Coastal Trail B&B
907.243.5809
www.coastaltrail.com

Anchorage Hilton
800.445.8667

Anchorage Walkabout Town
907.279.7808
www.anchoragewalkabout.com

Comfort Inn
800.228.5150

Hotel Captain Cook
800.843.1950

Ramada Inn
800.544.0970

Days Inn
800.329.7466

Santiago

The largest city in Chile, Santiago, population 8,000,000, has just about anything you could ask for. It is a modern cosmopolitan city, complete with the normal advantages and drawbacks. There are many places to go shopping (far more than Coyhaique, the location of our basecamp) so please plan to have all shopping done by the first day of the expedition.

As with all major cities, there are many accommodation options. Below are just a few, but many more in all price ranges can be found with a quick look on Google.

- Hyatt Regency Santiago: Av Kennedy 4601. Very nice, a bit off the main public transportation routes. www.santiago.regency.hyatt.com. \$100+ per night.
- Hotel Montecarlo: Victoria Subercaseaux 209. www.hotelmontecarlosantiago.com. 3 Star hotel with great views of Cerro Santa Lucia. \$40 per night
- Youth Hostel/Albergue Juvenil: Cienfuegos 151. +64-2-671-8532. Good, friendly staff. \$15 per night

Coyhaique

Coyhaique, population 30,000 is the largest settlement in the Aysen region. It has a good range of shops, a few big supermarkets and is quite a pleasant place if you just feel like hanging out on either end of the trip.

It has a good range of accommodation. All are within walking distance of the main plaza; it's a small town. Here are some that we like:

- Hostal Belisario Jara: If you feel like splashing out, I'd recommend this place; clients who've stayed here have raved about it. Around \$92 US for a double. www.belisariojara.com.
- Hospedaje Gladys: Moraleda 60: Simple, clean, centrally located, really nice lady that runs it. The owner speaks some English. Breakfast included. About \$25 US per person.
- Hospedaje Natti, Simpson 92: Again simple, clean, nice lady. No breakfast. About \$15 per person.

The Chile Handbook (www.moon.com) has some good accommodation information. If you want any more specific information about accommodation, please email or call us.

Insurance

It is **REQUIRED** that you have adequate medical and evacuation insurance for the duration of your stay. Please note that many household policies and cheap backpacker policies do not provide adequate cover. Most don't insure climbing/mountaineering. If you are coming from the UK, [The British Mountaineering Club](#) has great climbing insurance. From the USA, the best insurance we can find is available through [IHI](#).

In the unlikely event that you do have an accident you must be covered for all contingencies including **mountaineering and emergency air evacuation**.

We also recommend that you consider trip cancellation/interruption insurance. Last year we had a client get a hernia two days before an expedition. He was able to make a claim on his insurance, and they reimbursed his trip cost, airplane tickets, and some other expenses. Because he got his money back, he was able to rebook on a later trip, and everyone was happy (except perhaps the insurance company).

Currency

United States

As you probably have guessed, we use the US Dollar in Alaska. For an up to date currency conversion, visit the website: www.xe.com.

It's easiest if you travel with a credit or debit card. Anchorage has plenty of ATMs. It can be difficult to find places to change international currency. Either exchange some when you first arrive in the USA (the airport where you land) before you come up to Alaska, or exchange some before you leave home.

Chile

The Chilean currency is the Peso. For an up to date currency conversion, visit the website: www.xe.com.

It's easiest if you travel with a credit or debit card. Santiago and Coyhaique have plenty of ATMs. There are also some 'Casas de Cambio' (money exchanges) in both Santiago and Coyhaique where you will be able to exchange popular currencies such as American Dollars, Euros, or British Pounds.

Medical Information

It is unlikely that you will need vaccinations for Chile or the United State, but this is dependent on countries you have visited previously.

In the field, we can be a week or more away from help, so you need to get medical issues sorted before you come. It is your responsibility to disclose to The Patagonia Mountain Guide School any health concerns that you have. We reserve the right to refuse you a place on the expedition if you have medical concerns that may affect your ability to participate in the expedition. It is your responsibility to ensure that you have all the recommended vaccinations and take any prescribed or advised medication.

Health and Safety

Your guides are certified Wilderness First Aid Practicioners and will carry group first aid kits out in the field. You will need to bring a small personal first aid kit with things like personal medications (prescription and non-prescription), bandaids, elastic wraps, and a complete blister kit. See the gear list for further details.

Your insurance must cover field evacuations in the event on an emergency. We place a huge emphasis on risk management with everything we do. Discussions about safety, risk assessment, and judgement will be a commonplace while in the field. We reserve the right to expel someone from the trip if they fail to follow health and safety procedures, per our Participant Contract.

**Please feel free to contact us with any questions you may have.
We're looking forward to seeing you soon!**