

## **South America**

South America is an ethnic continent of superlatives comprising a cluster of countries situated mainly in the tropics. It has the tallest waterfalls, the highest mountain range, the biggest rain forest and largest river in the world and then the oldest rock paintings and ruins of an ancient civilization. The indigenous population is descendants of immigrants, Europeans and African slaves of the past. Spanish and Portuguese are the predominant languages in this continent and that brings us to the alluring rich culture and cuisine found here. Music like Samba, tango, bossa nova has its origin here; the food here has a touch of Asia, Africa, Spain, Andes and Amazon. The physical attractions are many in South America with the Andes Mountains looming on the western side and Amazon and Orinoco Rivers flowing through the eastern lowlands midst the highlands. The continent is bordered on the north and east by the Atlantic Ocean while the Pacific laps its western shores.

### **Recharge Yourself**

South America offers you nature in its pristine glory and helps you to look at the world anew. The continent's diverse geography, climate, history, culture, people and cuisine open up new vistas in your life. It is a whole new world out there - the driest deserts in the world, the misty Andean peaks, the Patagonian glaciers, the different civilizations, the different dialects, the many ancient traditions, the adventurous travels – all this and more make up South America.

A must-have is the Pisco sour, a cocktail made of pisco, lime, egg whites, ice and sugar, a famous Peruvian drink. Become an Inca farmer for a day and gain first-hand knowledge about non-artificial farming, medicinal values of plants from the farm owners in Cusco. End the day with a delicious lunch in the farm kitchen.

### **History and Culture**

The Spanish and the Portuguese colonized South America towards the end of 15<sup>th</sup> century disturbing the indigenous and mestizo cultures. After that, the African slaves came due to the extensive cotton farming. The 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century saw an influx of European immigrants into South America. Thus, the continent has a variety of human Diaspora who came in with their own cultures and languages and religions and soon mixed with the native South Americans.

### **Top Must-See Attractions in South America**

Brazil – Iguassu Falls is a natural wonder and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The incredible falls is on the border between Brazil, Argentina and Paraguay.

Argentina – The heavenly Mount Fitzroy and Buenos Aires are must see places in this country.

Venezuela – Visitors fly to the Canaima National Park only to watch the Angel Falls, also known as Salto Angel, which drops down from a height of 978 meters. It is also a World Heritage Site. The tropical wildlife can mesmerize you with the vibrant colors and shapes.

Ecuador – Galapagos Islands attract many a natural historian for its sheer and unique wildlife. This archipelago of 13 large islands and 6 small isles are remotely located, about 620 miles away from the western shores of South America. The Swing at the End of the

World in Banos is another popular spot for tourists. It is a swing from a tree-house at the edge of the cliff in Banos

Peru – The Machu Picchu is a World Heritage Site declared by UNESCO in 1983. This Inca resort was built around 1430 AD high up in the mountains. The flora and fauna of this region is one of a kind. Besides, there is The Milkyway over Lake Titicaca and the swinging Canopy Walk in Amazon among other attractions of Peru.

Chile – Hand of the Desert in Atacama can be a chilling and thrilling sight. The silent stone figures in Easter Island and Geysers el de Tatio must be in the bucket list when visiting Chile.

Colombia – Santuario de las Lajas, The River of five Colors, the picturesque Raquira, are some of the places to go to in Colombia.

Bolivia – Salar de Uyuni is a place you walk on icy glaciers. Travel on the World's Most Dangerous Road in Bolivia and shed off fear of heights.

### **Best Time to Visit South America**

October to November is a good time to visit the Amazon region. The dry season ensures plenty of wildlife sightings. Buenos Aires and Rio and the coastal areas have less crowd during this time of the year and the prices are fairly low.

Brazil is best visited between December and March, even though it is known as the high season with prices also soaring high. This is the best time for the coasts and beaches; not to mention the carnival.

Chile and Argentina close down in July to August due to snowfall.

### **How to Reach**

There are no trains or roads from North America to the south. However, there are plenty of low cost flights from New York, Newark, Toronto, Washington-Dulles, Houston, Atlanta and Orlando. There are some ferries plying between Panama and Colombia.

There are a number of flights from Asia – long nonstop ones and some with stopovers in the US, so you have to go through US customs and immigration.

South African airways connect Johannesburg with Buenos Aires and Sao Paulo.

There are many European airlines flying to Brasilia, Suriname, Rio de Janeiro, Buenos Aires, Lima and Caracas. Some of the airlines are TAP, KLM, Lufthansa, and British airways to name a few.

Argentina, Mexico, Colombia, Brazil, Chile have railways that run across the length and breadth of South America. The major airports also have regular domestic, inter-continental and international flights.

### **Traveler Tips – Do's and Don'ts**

North American and European tourists do not need a visa to enter Ecuador, but definitely a

valid passport.

Anti-malarial medicine is a must, especially in the rain forest areas.

Center for Disease Control recommend certain vaccinations before departing for certain South American regions.

Do not drink water from the tap. Drink only bottled water.

Do not drive at night anywhere in the continent – it can be dangerous.

The US dollar is accepted in most South American countries. Euros are accepted in French Guyana, pound sterling in Falkland Islands. In Venezuela it is wise to get exchange in the black market to get your dollar's worth.

Pack only what you need on the trip. It is best to leave behind expensive items at home. Leave your credit cards and other important documents in the hotel safe. Carry as much cash as you might need when venturing out of the hotel.

Be sure to read the “Stay Safe” tips of every region you plan to visit.