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4 Reasons You Need to Head to Patagonia for a Penguin
Adventure

Sandy Bornstein

February 24, 2017

International Travel, South America

1 Comment

Patagonia, a sparsely populated area in the southernmost region of South America, is *the* place to observe Magellanic penguins. The region spans almost half of the acreage in both Chile and Argentina. And while a substantial number of summer adventurers are lured to the region's mountains and glaciers for hiking and climbing, many wildlife lovers head to the coastlines just for these 2-foot tall flightless birds.

Explorer Ferdinand Magellan made note of the black and white penguins congregating on the southern tip of the South American shoreline in the early part of the sixteenth century, which is why they're named after him. Since then, the Magellanic penguins have become famous for their annual breeding migration. They begin to arrive in Patagonia in September to set up their coastal nesting colonies, mate, reproduce, and raise their chicks, before leaving in March and April.

So, what makes the Magellan penguins a major draw and why should you make the trek to see them?

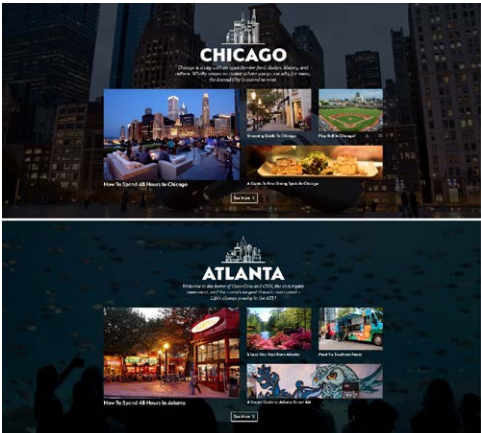
Their Lifecycle Is Fascinating



Image via Sandy Bornstein

These penguins create coastal nesting colonies in the grasslands along the shoreline or on adjacent islands. You won’t find them sliding on icy and snowy surfaces. The male penguins create the nest under bushes and sometimes burrow under rocks, in which the female usually lays two eggs. After the incubation period, both parents nurture their young chicks to maturity and the process can be witnessed and photographed/videoed at rookeries in Argentina and [Chile](#). The ideal time to visit is between December and February when both penguin parents will be taking care of their chicks.

There’s Limited Availability to See Them



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BLACK HISTORY



Image via Sandy Bornstein

From September to March, Magellanic penguins can only be found along the southern coasts of [Argentina](#) and Chile and on neighboring islands. Public viewing areas are restricted and monitored. Most of the popular places are difficult to reach and you should expect a lengthy and bumpy bus trip (5+ hours round trip) or a boat ride.

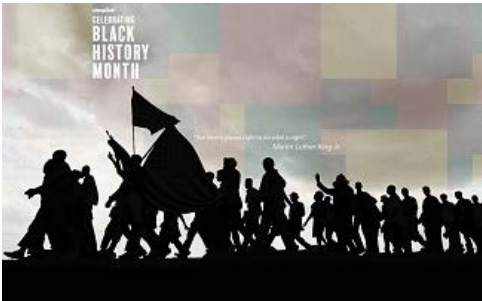
Popular destinations for penguin watching include [Punta Tombo Reserve](#) and [Estancia San Lorenzo Reserve](#) (Puerto Madryn, Argentina), Magdelana Island Natural Penguin Preserve (Punta Arenas, Chile), the Penguin Rookery (Ushuaia, Argentina), and Península San Julián Provincial Reserve (Province of [Santa Cruz, Argentina](#)). The [El Pedral Lodge](#) (Puerto Madryn) provides a more intimate encounter with a shorter drive. And you can also see Magellanic penguins along the coasts of the Falkland/Malvinas Islands.

They’re a Threatened Species

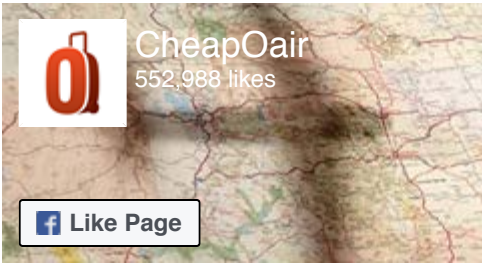


Image via Sandy Bornstein

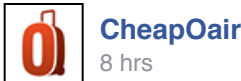
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Tip #1: Avoid the tourist traps and n squares for meals out.

The Magellanic penguin population is decreasing despite regional conservation efforts. The penguins' food supply is impacted by overfishing along the coastline and climate changes that have caused them to travel farther from the shoreline for food. Each year, fishermen inadvertently kill penguins in their netting. Leaking ballast water from tankers and unintentional oil spills also kill thousands of penguins because the oil decreases the insulating properties of the penguins' feathers. Since their future is unknown, it's best to plan a visit sooner rather than later.

Natural Wildlife Encounters Are Better Than Any Zoo



Image via Sandy Bornstein

Zoos provide exposure to a variety of animals. However, nothing compares to an up close and personal encounter with wildlife in their natural habitat. But care needs to be taken not to stress out Magellanic penguins. If a penguin starts to move its head from side to side, respect its territory and slowly move away.

Have you been Patagonia to see the Magellan penguins? Tell us about your experience in the comments below!

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ONE RESPONSE

Shane

April 26, 2017

I visited punto gumbo several years ago, it was amazing! You can literally walk among the penguins, an experience I will never forget, true the access to the rookery is quite a distance from the main highway, along a bumpy road, but well worth the trip. Patagonia itself is amazing, but distances are very long between towns and gas stations.

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Patagonia

South America

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Sandy Bornstein

Sandy Bornstein lived as an expat in India. Her award-winning memoir, *May This Be the Best Year of Your Life*, highlights what she learned as the only American teacher at an international Bangalore school. After living abroad, Sandy continues to explore the world and write about her travels. You can follow Sandy's adventures at www.sandrabornstein.com.

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