



ALTERNATIVE ADVENTURES

Clients seeking a bucket-list experience without the crowds? **Laura French** seeks out some of Latin America's best alternative spots

from the tumbling, snow-covered peaks of the Andes to the lush jungle scenes of the Amazon; the rainforests of Costa Rica, teeming with monkeys, to Guatemala's volcano-strewn landscape: Latin America is gifted with some of the planet's most extraordinary landscapes.

That makes its diverse, dramatic countries a hotspot for adventurous clients, whether they're surfers looking to ride the waves of Nicaragua, sandboarders wanting to plummet the slopes of the Atacama or trekkers keen to take on the icy slopes of Patagonia. That's before we even get on to the otherworldly wildlife of the

Galápagos, the glittering wetlands of Brazil's Pantanal or the eerily vast, bright-white salt flats of Bolivia.

And while the bucket-list experiences have garnered attention for good reason – think Peru, think Inca Trail – this is an enormous region, with a huge number of adventures available across Central and South America. If you know where to look, that is.

We've honed in on some of the best for clients wanting to escape the crowds and veer off the better-known trails, from Colombia's Lost City Trek to Costa Rica's off-radar rainforests and a patch of Patagonia that's as close to the end of the Earth as you'll get.



LIKE THIS?

THE INCA TRAIL

Mist-cloaked mountains, cloud-drenched forests and ancient ruins lead the way on the iconic Inca Trail, whose reward is Machu Picchu – the ancient citadel the Spanish never found. Altitudes of up to 4,200m make this four-day trek a challenge for budding adventurers, but with more and more flocking to trek its passes, the route can get crowded, and trips often get booked up several months in advance.

COLOMBIA'S LOST CITY TREK

WHY GO? For a quieter alternative, there's Colombia's Lost City Trek. This 28-mile round-trip winds its way through the Sierra Nevada Mountains to La Ciudad Perdida – a hillside city in the heart of the rainforest, believed to be 650 years older than Machu Picchu. Accessible only via the trek, it draws a fraction of the visitors of its Peruvian cousin, so you have views of its emerald terraces and crumbling plazas to yourself.

HIGHLIGHTS: Banana trees, cacao plants and dangling vines accompany you as you meander through the remote jungle, opening out on to rugged mountain peaks and secluded river valleys. Along the way you'll also encounter indigenous communities and learn more about the history of the ancient Tayrona people, who built this once-majestic settlement.

BOOK IT: G Adventures offers a seven-day trip from £412, including two nights in a hotel, four nights' camping, transport, most meals and an indigenous guide on the trek. gadventures.com

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TORRES DEL PAINE

Granite shards jutting above aqua pools, emerald forests harbouring elusive wildlife and luminescent glaciers stacked like blocks of polystyrene – it’s not hard to see why Torres del Paine, the heart of Chilean Patagonia, has garnered acclaim among adventurers the world over. Especially popular is the W Trek, a multi-day adventure that involves hiking through these icy landscapes with pumas, llama-like guanacos and condor birds.

TIERRA DEL FUEGO

WHY GO? For those looking to escape the crowds without sacrificing the chance to see Patagonia’s fabled scenery, few places rival Tierra del Fuego, straddling Argentina and Chile. Accessed from Ushuaia at the continent’s most southerly point, this isolated spot is about as close to Antarctica as you can get without actually going there – all aquamarine icebergs, crumbling glaciers and snowy peaks, with evergreen forests crowning the valleys.

HIGHLIGHTS: Hiking, skiing, flyfishing and kayaking are among the adventures on offer, while boat trips take visitors out on to the Beagle Channel, where sea lions, penguins and seabirds nestle on the islands. Glacier Alley is worth a visit for its towering glaciers, granite mountains and frozen waterfalls. Ushuaia is home to the End of the World Museum, which explores the indigenous people who inhabited these stark landscapes for thousands of years.

BOOK IT: Journey Latin America’s 14-day Active Argentina: Walking in Patagonia trip, visiting Buenos Aires, Los Glaciares National Park and Tierra del Fuego, starts at £3,800, including flights, transfers, excursions, accommodation and most meals. journeylatinamerica.co.uk



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LIKE THIS?

THE AMAZON

The world’s largest rainforest needs little preface. Home to one in 10 of the planet’s animal species and boasting more biodiversity than anywhere else on Earth, this 2.7 million square mile expanse is the stuff of legend for good reason. And it’s not only in Brazil that you can experience its extraordinary wildlife, with Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru and beyond offering their own take on caiman-dotted wetlands and verdant jungle-scapes.

COSTA RICA’S RAINFORESTS

WHY GO? If the Amazon has left your clients with a taste for more in the way of lush rainforest and fascinating wildlife, suggest Costa Rica. More than half of the country is covered in forest, with more than 230 mammal species and 800 bird species found nestling in its greenery.

HIGHLIGHTS: While the likes of monkey-filled Manuel Antonio draw the crowds, there are plenty of lesser-known spots. Among them is Tenorio Volcano National Park, which is home to toucans, bare-necked umbrellabirds, howler monkeys, pumas and jaguars. Elsewhere there’s Boca Tapada, a remote patch of rainforest where you can spot the endangered great green macaw, and Los Quetzales National Park, which lays claim to one of Costa Rica’s largest populations of quetzal birds.

BOOK IT: Latin Routes offers a 10-day Natural Wonders of Costa Rica tour from £1,799, including accommodation, some meals, excursions and transport. latinroutes.co.uk



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