

ARGENTINA - PUNA EXPERIENCE: SALTA & CATAMARCA



TRIP CODE

ARTSPESC

DURATION

5 Days

LOCATIONS

Argentina



INTRODUCTION

There are still a few places left where you can make a pioneering trip: Northern Argentina is one of them. The Andean puna of Northwest Argentina is a land where nature is still the owner, a land of colours and silence, where the sheer size and beauty of the landscapes is truly humbling. An unknown territory for most people, it is a land that leaves its mark.

There are many great trips in the northwest, many not as adventurous as this one, but we have chosen to promote this intense three-day adventure to the puna as it is a trip that few US operators are offering - yet. It is a journey to the west of Salta into the heart of the Andes, a journey on which you will go above 4,000 meters. The places we take you will leave you speechless, breathless and completely blown away, adventure travel at its very best.


ITINERARY

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DAY 1: Salta to Tolar Grande

Just 30 km away from Salta, the Toro’s Gorge is a natural elevator connecting the green Valley of Lerma with the desert plateau known as Puna. In 95 km this wild Quebrada rises from 1200 meters up to 4000mts in Abra Blanca Pass, the entering point to the Puna. The Inca explored this passage as well since it was part of the Capaq Ñam or Royal Trail, a 5000 kilometer strategic trail built to unite the Inca Empire from Quito in Ecuador to Mendoza in Argentina. San Antonio de los Cobres is the actual Capital of the Puna, a dusty village with a colored community, our last point of civilization and arrival point of most tourists. Abra Chorrillos will be our highest point and there will learn about the Apacheta and its cultural importance for the Andean tradition. After the crossing of the geologically dying Salted lake of Pocitos, a 3-hour drive in wild and untouched nature begins. The Labyrinth Desert is a 10 million-year fossil dune desert formed by clay picks and gypsum crystals. Nowadays, it is possible to drive across this natural wonder, a must for photo safari lovers. Tolar Grande lies at the border of a giant depression, the Salar de Arizaro, one of the biggest salt flats in the world, and from this tiny old railway village built in 1940, there is a unique view over the western ridge of the Cordillera an infinite skyline of Volcanoes higher than 6.000 meters.



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DAY 2: Tolar Grande, Caipe, Salar Rio Grande, Mina Casual

Mina Casualidad was a Mine City located in one of the most remote and amazing places on Earth. Just at the limit with Chile surrounded by the Highest Volcanoes of the world, between Sulphuric Mountains, Salted Lakes and Cobalt sky at 4.200 meters, used to live 3.000 people. Miners were working at 5.200 meters and their families and the administrative staff at the City of Mina Casualidad. The mine had been shut down by the Army during the 70’s and today Mina Casualidad is a unique Ghost Town. Caipe was the old railway station where the mineral processed in the Mine city was carried on cargo train and then transported to Salta. From the abandoned Station, the traveler can have a wide view of the Giant Salar de Arizaro. In the afternoon on our way back to Tolar Grande, with just the perfect light of the sunset, all the Puna will offer its best scenery.



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DAY 3: Arita Cone to El Peñón

The crossing of the Arizaro Salted dry lake resembling the ancient journey of the Arrieros (shepherds guiding caravans of animals to Chile). Arizaro means Vultures Cemetery, comes from that period when many animals (cows and horses) perished during the crossing of the salt flat. Antofalla is an important and spectacular example of a Puna Oasis; in the middle of a high altitude desert there is a green valley, thanks to a natural pure water spring, full of Alamos, Molles and Sauce trees. Antofalla, together with Antofagasta and Santa Rosa, were important stations for Llama caravans connecting this part of the Andes with the Oasis of Atacama. The Oasis is located just at the border of the longest salt flat in the world, among red mountains and lava strips. Antofalla is still inhabited by a tiny community of 60 people, they are all shepherds. We will have lunch in one of their homes and then cross the colored mirror of the salt lake. Above 4.200 meters with wide views over the Antofalla Volcano (6.400 mts) lays a kind of green field (Vega Colorada) home of llamas, suris (Andean ostrich), wild donkeys and vicuñas. The valley of Calalaste, just a few kilometers away from Vega Colorada is the best spot to find wild camelids. Antofagasta de la Sierra, was the biggest Oasis on the path connecting this side of the Andes with the Oasis of San Pedro de Atacama (Chile), it is a big village with more than 2.000 people who maintain their ancient traditions and culture. The name Antofagasta means “place where the sun shines” and it is surrounded by uncountable Volcano Peaks.



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DAY 4: El Peñón | Pumice Stone Field and/or Laguna Grande

Program from October to April (austral summer):
 In the morning: Visit to Campo de Piedra Pómez, a strange and stunning landscape carved into the rock that gives rise to its name: The Pumice, of purely igneous origin, was produced by a massive explosion of the volcanic stratum. This explosion was so powerful that if one could have seen it, it would have been similar to the mushroom cloud produced by a bomb. This cloud spread the ashes and debris in large areas and in different directions that were crystallized by the effects of the temperature and gave life to these wonderful rocks with special features, with plenty of holes produced by the escape of gases during the chilling stage. This degassing phenomenon made the rock very easy to carve by the winds of the Puna, arid and harsh winds that move freely through the region where they become the best and most prominent Andean rock sculptors. In the afternoon: Visit to Laguna Grande reserve, a place of unique beauty that keeps fragile treasures of the environment. It is a saline lake that sits at an altitude of 4150 mts, path to the crater of the Galan volcano, the largest in the world. During winter, the water freezes completely, but when spring arrives, it becomes the largest gathering center of the Puna flamingo birds, also called Small Parina (*Phoenicopterus jamesi*), with more than 19,000 birds (25% of the known total population). It is also a place for summer congregation for the Andean flamingo (*Phoenicopterus andinus*) and it is a common nesting site of Southern flamingo (*Phoenicopterus chilensis*). We will visit Laguna Grande, respecting it as an Andean sanctuary and appreciating species of exotic birds in their natural habitat. Program from May to September (austral winter): Visit to Campo de Piedra Pómez, a strange and stunning landscape carved into the rock that gives rise to its name: The Pumice, of purely igneous origin, was produced by a massive explosion of the volcanic stratum. This explosion was so powerful that if one could have seen it, it would have been similar to the mushroom cloud produced by a bomb. This cloud spread the ashes and debris in large areas and in different directions that were crystallized by the effects of the temperature and gave life to these wonderful rocks with special features, with plenty of holes produced by the escape of gases during the chilling stage. This degassing phenomenon made the rock very easy to carve by the winds of the Puna, arid and harsh winds that move freely through the region where they become the best and most prominent Andean rock sculptors. This strange landscape of white labyrinths and climbing dunes is located a few miles to the west, on a track that we will pass, where the path continues through some sand that could be described as the dream of the explorer and overlanding adventurers. On the way, we will pass very close to a young volcano: the Carachi Pampa entirely painted in black by the spill of basaltic lava in ancient geological times and the lake of the same name.



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DAY 5: Hualfin | Santa María | Cafayate

After three days of Intense Trip on the High Desert Plateau, the North West has still plenty of surprises. The paved road from El Peñón to meet Route 40 is a 150 km long yellow field of Paja Brava, white lagoons and a deserted narrow canyon with rich vegetation inside. At Santa Maria you will experience a Real Argentine Asado, with a simple parrilla made by our gaucho friend. Then, we will do a quick stop in Cafayate, a pleasant town surrounded by green vineyards. In the afternoon with the best light of the day we'll go across the Quebrada de las Conchas Gorge, 55 km of scenic sedimentary rock formations, dated from 40 to a hundred million years old, with geological formations as the Yacoraite or the Pirguas of great importance. Salta and its green valley will welcome us after 5 days of unique adventure. Note: Visit to Quilmes Ruins Upon Request! Entrance fee not included.



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INCLUSIONS & DETAILS

Accommodation	Standard
Inclusions	Included food Day one: Lunch and dinner in local restaurants. Day two: Breakfast, Box lunch and dinner in local Restaurant. Day three: Breakfast, Box lunch and dinner in Hosteria El Peñón. Day four: Breakfast, Box lunch and dinner in Hosteria El Peñón. Day five: Breakfast, Private Asado in Santa Maria.
Difficulty Rating	Not Available
Single Surcharge	Available upon request
Notes	The Itinerary is subject to weather conditions in the region to be visited, for this reason last minute changes may take place in order to ensure a safe trip.
Price Dependent upon	Season and availability

SUSTAINABILITY

Chimu Adventures undertakes a number of sustainability measures within its operations

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including:

- 1) Only using local guides and office staff to both maximise local employment opportunities and minimise carbon footprints. Local guides also ensure you benefit from the intimate knowledge, passion and culture of the country you're visiting.
- 2) Where possible, using locally owned and operated boutique hotels to maximise the return to the local community.
- 3) Chimu's "Pass it on" programme has provided funding to hundreds of local community projects in Latin America. Our aim is to empower local communities, helping them to develop their own infrastructure for the future. Since 2006, we have been working with Kiva (a well-known Non-Governmental Organisation), providing hundreds of loans to local businesses all over South America.
- 4) In our pre tour information we provide a range of tips and advice on how to minimise your impact on both local environments and communities.
- 5) Chimu Adventures' offices also take a number of sustainability measures including carbon offsets for company vehicles and most staff travel. Chimu Adventure's internal processes are also structured to create a paperless office and to reduce waste. There are also internal programmes to help staff minimise their carbon footprint such as our staff bike purchase assistance plan which encourages office staff to commute to work via bicycle. Currently almost half of our office based staff commute to work via bicycle.

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