PATAGONIA
Torres del Paine
National Park

Oleg Senkov

wilderness explorer series

90 GPS coordinates
14 images
1 trekking map
prices in AR$, US$, €
40 website links
hiking trails elevations

for:
wildlife photographers
hikers & trekkers
nature lovers
budget travelers

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TORRES DEL PAINE NATIONAL PARK

ABOUT PARK

“Torres del Paine” National Park [map-50.979737, -72.800511] (Parque Nacional Torres del Paine) (www.parquetorresdelpaine.cl/en) is one of the most famous for hiking and trekking national parks in Patagonia and worldwide, it is also the largest (~238,298 hectares or 2,382 km², its shape is roughly an oval ~70x40 km) and most visited parks in Chile (in 2016, ~252,447 annually visitors, >50% not Chileans). The word “Torres” means from Spanish “Towers”, while “Paine”, meaning “Blue” as color, is derived from a language which was/is still used by “Tehuelche” or “Aónikenk” indigenous Pre-Hispanic people, who are living in the Southern Patagonia region for more than 14,500 years, and were predominant here in the Pre-Columbian Era of Patagonia and South America.

The park was created in 1959 and named as “Torres del Paine” in 1970, while declared as a Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO in 1978. Three gigantic granite rock towers shoot high-sky, resembling to some either three “teeth” or “fangs”, to others “horns” or three “knife blades”, to me personally, they look more like spikes on the back and the tail of a prehistoric dinosaur called “Stegosaurus”, who might had lived here 150 million years ago. Tallest tower from the three is 2501 m high, however, the tallest in the park is the neighboring “Cerro Paine Grande” summit, ~ 2884 m high, some maps give 3005 m. These giants can be indeed
steel blueish, if covered by snow and ice, or if some blue-in-color chemical elements are exposed due to erosion and oxidation, are the major landmarks in the park, and in the whole “Cordillera Paine” mountain group (age is about 12-13 million years). Therefore, the park was named “Torres del Paine” (“Blue Towers”).

Nowadays, the park is managed by a non-profit private organization called “National Forest Corporation” (“Corporación Nacional Forestal”, CONAF, www.conaf.cl), which is controlled and funded by Ministry of Agriculture of Chile. CONAF is responsible for management and safety (park rangers, fire protection, wildlife and forest protection) of ~36 National Parks, ~51 National Reserves and ~15 Natural Monuments in the entire Chile.


**PARK ENTRANCE FEE**
The park entrance fee for foreigners in **High Season** (1 October – 30 April) is the most expensive in Patagonia: CH$21.000 (CH$ - Chilean Peso), ~€29-30, ~US$35; in **Low Season** (1 May – 30 September) is ~ about twice less. For children (age: 6-16 years) is CH$6.000 and CH$4.000, respectively. For adult Chileans, CH$6.000
and CH$4.000, respectively. Though, if you study or work in Chile, you can enter the park as Chilean. Once you paid the fee, you can stay in the park as long as you wish, but, if you leave the park, you need to buy a new ticket to enter it again, unless, you marked your ticket with a stamp at the entrance office, then, you can reenter the park again once more. Please, be aware that you can pay the entrance fee with Chilean Cash only, and there are no ATMs around!

**IMPORTANT QUICK RULES**

There are several important rules in the park you must know before you start planning your visit here; it might be a bit complicated for newcomers:

1) All reservations for Campings/Refugios in the park are **mandatory** (!!!) before you enter the park, the rule is valid since 15th 2016;
2) Official park’s website is: [www.parquetorresdelpaine.cl](http://www.parquetorresdelpaine.cl);
3) There are 3 independent owners for all Campings and Refugios in the park located along “**W**” or “**O**” circuits: “**Vertice**” ([www.vertecepatagonia.com](http://www.vertecepatagonia.com)), “**Fantastico Sur**” ([www.fantasticosur.com](http://www.fantasticosur.com)) and “**CONAF**” ([www.parquetorresdelpaine.cl](http://www.parquetorresdelpaine.cl)), each of them you have to book independently, through their own websites;
4) “**W**” circuit can be done (1 September – 30 April) in any direction, clockwise or counter-clockwise, and it does not require a guide, since it is well marked and maintained;
5) “**O**” circuit, however, can be done (1 November – 30 April) only East-
to-West, counter-clockwise: “Seron-Dickson-Los Perros-Grey”, and it is subject to weather conditions (some passes, or trails can be closed at short notice or can be done only with a guide);

6) “Vertice” owns 3 Refugios and 4 Campings, mostly at the West part of the park; to reserve “Vertice” Campings/Refugios, you can either go to their office [☎-51.728415, -72.511456] in Puerto Natales (Manuel Bulnes 107, Mo-Fr, 9:00-13:00 and 14:30-18:00, Sat 9:30-12:00, Sun - closed, tel: +56 61 241 2742) or do it on-line by sending an email at ventas@vertecepatagonia.cl;

7) “Fantastico Sur” owns 4 Refugios, 5 Campings, 1 Domes, 1 Cabins in the central and East parts of the park; to reserve “Fantastico Sur” Campings/Refugios, again, you can do it in their office [☎-51.728162, -72.501519] in Puerto Natales (Esmeralda 661, Mo-Sat, 9:00-13:00 and 15:00-18:30, Sun – closed, email: ventas@fantasticosur.com, tel: +56612614184) or on-line at their website www.fantasticosur.com; you can pay your bookings via credit cards, bank transfer or PayPal;

8) to reserve CONAF free camps (“PASO”, “ITALIANO” or “TORRES”, however “TORRES” is closed in the 2018 season), go to the park’s website www.parquetorresdelpaine.cl, press a button “Reservas de Campamentos” (the page is in Spanish, use your browser translator); once you did CONAF reservation, you’ll receive a confirmation email, which, either, you can print on an A4 size paper and carry in the park or you can have it on your
smartphone or tablet electronically; CONAF reservations can be made only for 1 or 2 people; group bookings are not accepted; you can make CONAF reservations as early as 180 days in advance; you can stay only 1 night at each free and basic CONAF camping sites.
HOW TO GET HERE

The main gateway to the “Torres del Paine” National Park is a small (~3x3 km, ~20,000 people) town called Puerto Natales, in which, usually, tourists commute from Punta Arena, the biggest town in the region (~10x5 km, ~117,430 people, has an airport). Puerto Natales is located [📞-51.733333, -72.516667] at the Strait of Magellan’s passage, at the Última Esperanza Sound – an inlet formed by Eberhard Fjord and Monte Balmaceda.

There are a lot of buses going daily from Puerto Natales to the “Torres del Paine” National Park and back. They all go from a newly-built modern main Bus Station in the city, “Rodoviario Autobus Estacion” or “Terminal Puerto Natales” [💻www.recorrido.cl/en/bus/terminales/terminal-puerto-natales] [📞-51.728787, -72.488262], located ~2 km from the downtown (a 25-30 min walk with a backpack or take a taxi, it is cheap there). At the website, you can look at updated timetables and prices, and buy your tickets online for the “Bus-Sur” bus company. However, at the Terminal, you can buy tickets of other bus companies, which commute to the park and back (see below) in a very similar way, since they all have to be synchronized with the catamaran (a modern boat with two parallel hulls) at the “Lago Pehoe”. Bus trip duration is ~ 2 hours, ~115 km, you drive first by the road 9 (Ruta 9, paved), then Y-150 (gravel) and Y-156 (gravel) to the main entrance to the park “Laguna Amarga” [📞-50.979524, -72.800446]. Here, you pay the entrance fee and you are registered by CONAF (officials know you are in the