

Travel Plan ahead

Right now, the entire South American continent is on the UK government's red list. Nonetheless Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru are all open for business and welcoming tourists (mainly from the US); Chile opens on August 31; and tourist board Visit Argentina says it is hoping its borders will reopen "really soon".

It's hard to predict what will happen between now and January, but if case rates keep falling and governments keep jabbing, there are expectations that 2022 will mark the beginning of the recovery of the continent's extraordinarily diverse tourism industry.

The first of us back may find a political landscape that has undergone a seismic shift as a result of the pandemic. Peru has elected a radical leftist former teacher as president; Ecuador a millionaire banker; and Argentina and Chile could see the old ruling classes replaced by younger, more socially conscious administrations. The future in South America rarely looks boring.

PERU

In the year in which the nation celebrates the bicentenary of its independence, Peru is once again in transition. The interim president has been replaced by Pedro Castillo of the radical leftist Peru Libre party, whose slogan is "No mas pobres en un pais rico" (no more poor people in a rich land).

He's leading a country hit hard by Covid, but daily cases have fallen from about 10,000 a day in April to 1,200 at the end of July, and at the time of going to press, only the Arequipa region and neighbouring Moquegua still had Very High Alert status. Elsewhere curfews are strict and the law requires you to wear two masks.

Tourists are welcome, but if you want to hike the Inca Trail next year you should consider booking now – with capacity halved to about 100 tourists a day until the end of this year, demand is pushing into 2022. Although there are alternatives.

THE SALKANTAY TRAIL

Higher, longer and significantly less crowded than the Inca Trail, the Salkantay route winds 43 miles over the breathtaking Nevada Salkantay – topping out at just over 15,000ft – to Machu Picchu. You'll visit the ruins at Llactapata on day six, with views across the Urubamba River to the Inca citadel. It's lodge-based, meaning soft beds and warm showers at the end of each day. **Details** Seven nights' B&B from £2,460pp, including private guides, porters, internal travel and permits (ganeandmarshall.com). Fly to Lima

FOODIE PERU

The nation's gourmet reputation began in the 1990s when, in Lima, chef Gaston Acurio shifted from French cuisine to a Peruvian menu, using ingredients that had been unavailable during the civil war. This ten-day gastronomic adventure was conceived by Acurio's former head chef Virgilio Martinez, who now runs Lima's celebrated Central restaurant, and Mater, a research foundation dedicated to the exploration and preservation of Peru's traditional foods. Experiences range from piranha fishing in the Amazon to cooking lessons in Cuzco and, finally, dinner at Central. **Details** Ten nights' B&B from £7,400pp, including some meals and flights (blacktomato.com). Fly to Lima

ECUADOR

When conservative former banker Guillermo Lasso assumed Ecuador's presidency at the end of May, he promised to immunise nine million people in his first 100 days in office. Just 67 days in, he's reached that goal. It's a remarkable turnaround in a country that has one of the highest death rates from Covid-19, and is the worst affected in terms of tourism job losses, with 15 per cent of the sector out of work. No wonder then that Ecuador was one of the first South American nations to reopen to tourists, back in March. Business is now picking up fast, with attractions busy and countrywide biosafety protocols certified by the World Travel & Tourism Council's (WTTC) Safe Travels seal.

FAMILY NATURE HOLIDAY

You get a lot for your money on this two-week trip. Starting in the capital, Quito, you first travel northeast – crossing the Equator – to seek spectacled

bears in the cloud forests of the Maquipucuna Reserve, then far south to El Boliche and the Cotopaxi Sanctuary Lodge, where you sleep in giant domes beneath the snow-capped volcano. Finally you fly east, to the Yasuni National Park at the headwaters of the Amazon – arguably the most biodiverse location on the planet – for jungle hikes, boat trips and an introduction to the Kichwa Añangu indigenous community.

Details Fourteen nights' B&B from £4,663pp, including flights (stubbornmuletravel.com)

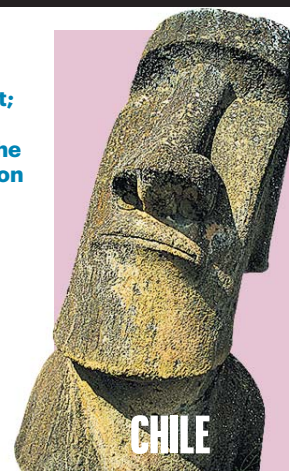
GALAPAGOS ISLAND HOPPING

Remember the racer snakes from *Planet Earth 2*? You could see them, along with marine iguanas, blue-footed boobies, albatrosses, sea lions and Darwin finches, on this great-value trip to the world's most spectacular wildlife destination. Staying in a hotel rather than sleeping on a boat, you'll take guided day trips to the five main islands – San Cristobal, Española,



WHAT'S GOING ON IN SOUTH A





Guanacos in Chile, above; beachside in Bahia, Brazil, left; cycling in Argentina's Lake District, far left; Torres del Paine National Park, Chile, below

A fruit seller in Cartagena, Colombia, left; Peruvian cuisine; see the Moai statues on Chile's Easter Island, right

PATAGONIA IN COMFORT

The Explora El Chalten, facing straight up the Electric Valley to Mount Fitz Roy and the Marconi Glacier, could be the most spectacular hotel opening of 2021. The views from the Scandi-style property are so huge they'll give you neck ache, but there's a spa to fix that. Outside the scale and grandeur of Patagonia's landscape – experienced over three days of hiking – will make you weep. El Chalten is the highlight of a luxury trip that includes four nights in Buenos Aires and three in Argentina's wine capital of Mendoza. **Details** Twelve nights' B&B from £6,130pp, including flights (audleytravel.com)

LAKE DISTRICT BY BIKE

This trip through the Lake District of Argentina and Chile includes nine days in the saddle with a guide, covering up to 28 miles daily through thundering rivers, snow-capped mountains, smoking volcanoes and turquoise lakes. This group trip is rated moderate to challenging.

Details Sixteen nights' B&B from £4,399pp, including nine lunches, one dinner and flights (exodus.co.uk)

ARGENTINA
Iguazu Falls visitor numbers have dropped from 3,000 a day to 150

COLOMBIA

Protests that broke out in April over a proposed tax hike have evolved into a mass movement against the right-wing administration of President Ivan Duque. These troubles, focused mainly on the southern city of Cali, are unlikely to affect tourists. Visitors will find most attractions and

accommodation open and covered by the WTTC's Safe Travels certification.

Covid case rates here are also falling fast, with 169 per day per one million people compared with 378 in the UK at the time of going to press. Entry requirements for Colombia are relaxed. The ban on flights from the UK has been lifted and no PCR tests, vaccination certificates or quarantine are required.

THE GRAND TOUR

This small-group tour takes you from the colonial architecture of Bogota's La Candelaria district, loops west to the coffee country of Quindio, then goes north via Medellin to Santa Marta on the coast before ending in beautiful Cartagena. Travelling by air and road, you'll taste jungle fruits in rural markets, learn to cook sancocho soup, explore Medellin and hike to the beaches in the Tayrona National Park.

Details Twelve nights' B&B from £3,885pp, including some meals, all activities and flights (explore.co.uk)

CRUISING ON THE MAGDALENA RIVER

One writer whose work truly resonated during the pandemic is Gabriel Garcia Márquez. His *100 Years of Solitude* is set on the mysterious Magdalena River, flowing 949 miles from the Andes to Barranquilla. Colombia's jugular is the newest destination for cruise operator AmaWaterways, with two seven-night itineraries taking up to 80 passengers aboard a custom-built, all-suite cruiser. There's a catch, though: the as-yet-unnamed vessel doesn't launch until 2023, with prices and schedules to be announced (metropolitan-touring.com). Fly to Bogota.

CHILE

Increasing disillusionment with the ruling elite among young, educated voters could

No, we can't go now, but there are inspiring trips to look forward to in 2022, says *Chris Haslam*

AMERICA?



DAVID RUIZ & IVYRIA TUCAL FILIPPE FRAZAO/GETTY IMAGES

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