



PHOTOGRAPHING  
*Patagonia*

---

EXPLORING THE END OF THE WORLD  
IS BEST DONE WITH A CAMERA. BY DAN AVILA





It was a perfectly planned morning. Be up before dawn, take my position on a hilltop outside the gorgeous Explora Patagonia lodge, set up my medium-format camera on a heavy tripod and capture the first golden rays of morning as they paint the striking Torres del Paine Massif. However, Patagonia cares not for the plans of men. The morning was freezing cold, cloudy and blowing so impossibly hard, I was on my knees to avoid cascading down the hill.

The Torres del Paine National Park is no canned holiday experience. It is raw, sometimes hostile, potentially dangerous, yet – just like everything in life that is truly attractive – it is this untamed purity that is so captivating.

Nervous, but not beaten, I set out in the pre-dawn darkness the next morning. Patagonia smiled on me with glorious conditions that yielded the full majesty of the dawn across the peaks, turning into one of those special days that drives my photography obsession.

So much about this UNESCO biosphere is otherworldly. A single hike through the wilderness took us through grassy valleys guarded by sheer cliffs, through to dense hidden forests bisected by icy cold rivers and waterfalls. Herds of Alpaca-like *guanacos* cautiously meandered by, as large hares darted through the undergrowth and enormous condors wheeled above.

Any journey to this antipodean wilderness is not complete without experiencing Grey Glacier. Patagonia contains the third largest ice mass in the world and even the iridescent icebergs floating on the freezing Lago Grey barely prepared me for the sight of the 30m-high glacier wall, which loomed like a set from *Game of Thrones*.

Chilean *gauchos* (horsemen) are famed for their skill and Explora Patagonia offers breathtaking guided rides. Feeling the rush of blood as we galloped across the plains and through shallow waterways, egged on by the *gaucho* – laughing at this grinning gringo – I later hobbled to my stunning digs at the Explora Lodge, cursing my horse-gripping inner thighs, convincing myself they would be fine for the big trek the next day. And with Mother Nature's finest work outside my door, no amount of muscle pain could keep me away. •

*Dan Avila shot these images on the Fujifilm GFX50S Medium Format Camera, with the GF120mm f/4 macro, GF32-64mm f/4 and GF23mm f/4 lenses.*

**Opening image:** The moon illuminates the Torres del Paine Massif in the pre-dawn light with the frozen timber paths leading back to the Explora Patagonia Lodge.

**Clockwise from right:** Icy streams flow off the mountains through forests in the Torres del Paine National Park; Everything about this landscape is dramatic with wild weather washing over the mountains as the Grey Glacier just comes into view; Alpaca-like guanacos graze on the fertile hills below the Torres del Paine Massif; Forget four seasons in one day. Patagonia can deliver four seasons in an hour requiring explorers to be prepared with waterproof clothing and multiple layers.



**Clockwise from right:** Inclement one day, perfect the next - such is the weather in Patagonia, with the morning light rewarding early risers; The imposing 30m-high face of the Grey Glacier is as foreboding as it is impressive; A tranquil riverside paradise makes for a perfect coffee stop on a four-hour hike.







**Above:** Old Man's Beard (*Usnea barbata*) is one of the most prevalent and characteristic species of lichen in Patagonian forest ecosystems.

**Right:** The Grey Glacier moves slowly and mills the surrounding rocks into powder that causes the lake to appear dense and cloudy.



**Left:** Hiking to the turquoise lake in front of the Torres del Paine Massif offers a rewarding view for the moderately fit.

**Below:** With local cougars at the top of the food chain, guanacos must be ever vigilant as they traverse the grasslands of Patagonia.



## TRAVEL FACTS

### GETTING THERE

- LATAM airlines flies to South America directly on a daily basis. [latam.com/en\\_au](https://www.latam.com/en_au)

### WHEN TO GO

Peak season is the warmer months: November to early March (summer in the Southern Hemisphere). Budding photographers should note that Patagonia is less crowded and highly picturesque in the winter months.

### FURTHER INFORMATION

Adventure World offers four-night stays at Explora Patagonia, the only lodge at the centre of Torres del Paine National Park set amongst the mountain peaks. A range of daily explorations to suit every ability are led by specialist naturalist guides. 1300-295-049; [adventureworld.com.au](https://www.adventureworld.com.au)