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COVER **LUCKY MIYA**, FAERIE GLEN NR, PRETORIA  
PHOTO **SVEN MUSICA / PHONIX CAPTURE**



Imposing Mount Fitz Roy invariably takes your breath away, whether you're running or not.

# Glorious Glaciers of Argentina

**Richard and Bev are Team Eat.Run. See, two former South Africans now living in Vancouver. Follow their insights, experiences, and culinary quirks issue by issue from the countries and trails they visit on their multi-year vegan globe-running adventure.**

PHOTO BEV ATTFIELD

**A**fter our outstanding experience in Chilean Patagonia (told in TRAIL 15), we thought that nothing could compare to the vast uninhabited wilderness, lakes, glaciers, and mountains of Torres del Paine. Boy, were we wrong! The magnificent Los Glaciares National Park in Argentinian Patagonia quietly inhabits the landscape with slowly shifting ice fields, towering peaks, and wind-swept flora.

Patagonia is a region in the southern reaches of South America known for its captivating mountains, lakes, glaciers, and untouched landscape. Patagonia extends into both Chile and Argentina.

We explored two areas of this breathtaking area: first, in and around the **Torres del Paine National Park** in Chile and second, near the hiking mecca of El Chalten within the Los Glaciares National Park in Argentina.

## MOUNTAIN TOWN

We based ourselves in the small town

of **El Chalten**, the trekking capital of Argentina. El Chalten is nestled within the Los Glaciares National Park and provides near-doorstep access to a wide variety of mountain trails in the region leading to and through some of the most amazing scenery on the planet.

We loved the simple and understated commitment to mountain exploration in El Chalten. The singular purpose of the town is to support the trekking community, making this a very easy place to find information and exchange grand stories of mountain adventures!

Not to be outdone by those who prefer both feet on the ground, this region is also popular with rock and ice climbers.

## MOUNT FITZ ROY

After a few days of weather-imposed downtime (common in these parts!), we

departed on our first mountain exploration run - to discover the majestic **Mount Fitz Roy** standing tall at 3,359m. The spectacular view of this massif is the reward at the turnaround of the 23km out-and-back Laguna de Los Tres trail with 1,000m of ascent.

Starting at the edge of town, the clearly marked trail winds up steadily along singletrack with varied terrain underfoot. It's at times hard-packed dirt, other times rooty with thick bush, but always beautiful with the freshest mountain air imaginable.



Spectacular scenery on the trail to Laguna Torre.

PHOTO RICHARD ATTFIELD



The trail opens up and flattens somewhat when it traverses the Del Salto stream valley and follows the natural course of the stream passing through two campgrounds along the way. Natural viewpoints offer glimpses of the Fitz Roy peak, but it's only by pressing on and up the final and very steep grind of almost a kilometre that you reach the trail terminus point at the edge of an old moraine ridge.

From this vantage point you can attempt to make sense of the full frontal assault on your eyes: a crystal blue lagoon and eons of glacier pack pushing up against the towering Mount Fitz Roy, alongside its less well-known but no less striking siblings.

With the sun out, we basked in its warmth and the privilege of finding ourselves at this amazing juncture while eating our customary trail snack of peanut butter and jam sandwiches. Fueled up for our return journey, we reluctantly turned away from the breathtaking view and completed the trail in reverse. Our legs enjoyed the downhill as much as our minds celebrated the gift of wanderlust!

## MORE TO EXPLORE

There are numerous other trails to explore from the village of El Chalten. We ran several shorter ones to a few easily accessible viewpoints, as well as one longer run. This 21km out-and-back trot with 600m of elevation gain took us along the undulating and relatively easy (albeit rocky) **Laguna Torre** trail to its eponymous lake, fed by the Torre and Grande glaciers.

Here the mountain vistas are just as grand as Mount Fitz Roy, with the jagged spire of **Cerro Torre** reaching above the rest of the Adela range at a height of 3,128m.

If you're lucky enough to arrive at this point on a clear day (we weren't), the mythical Cerro Torre may be revealed.

We had to settle for a brief glimpse of the spiky ridges before a windstorm swept in and literally blew us off our feet, while a heavy blanket of cloud descended over the mountains and into the lake basin. We scrambled for cover under a rock shelf until the worst of the storm passed and then hightailed it back to the warmth and safety of our cosy hostel.

Another day well lived! ▲

## VIVA LA VEGAN!

So what do a pair of **plant-powered** runners do for food in a country that's obsessed with char-grilled meat? You get creative and find beautiful hidden gems in the most surprising places. In the large city of **Buenos Aires**, we were spoiled for choice with a wide array of 100% vegan (some even **raw food!**) restaurants and others that suitably accommodated our dietary request. In the small towns of **El Calafate** and **El Chalten**, we had to work a little harder, but were no less delighted by the charming establishments committed to plant-based cuisine and others that surprised us with their creativity. We had wonderful veggie pizza, Asian tofu rice bowls, curries, falafel wraps, and even vegan baked goods to go with our incredibly flavourful freshly ground coffee. We were also lucky enough to find hostels with full kitchens in every part of Argentina we visited. And we discovered well-stocked **supermarkets** - even in the small town of El Chalten. This allowed us to cook our own meals and enjoy the company of other travellers making and eating food together. We often had interesting conversations as our dinner mates quizzed us on our **'strange' diet** and ability to survive on only plants for food. Even more astounding to them was how we could run up and down mountains and over trails with not a lick of meat or dairy to make us strong. Fancy that!

## Patagonian Primer

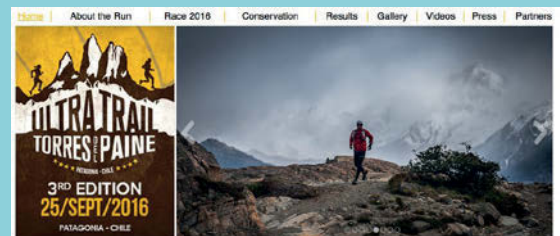
- ▲ **WEATHER.** Patagonian weather is unpredictable with extreme weather conditions, especially strong winds and quickly changing temperatures (up and down).
- ▲ **CLOTHING.** Bring layers and a good wind/rain jacket along with gloves, hat, and neck covering.
- ▲ **PROTECTION.** Use sunscreen and lip balm (coconut oil works well for both - Ed) to prevent sun- and wind-burn.
- ▲ **BEST TIME TO VISIT.** October through March (we visited in late March and it was already cold).
- ▲ **ACCESS.** El Calafate is the gateway town to Los Glaciares National Park.
- ▲ **TRANSPORT.** Regular buses run between El Calafate and El Chalten, a small town located in the park providing access to some of Argentina's finest mountain trails for single or multi-day outings.
- ▲ **INFRASTRUCTURE.** This region is much less structured and supported than the Torres del Paine circuits, but multi-day adventures with overnight camping are possible if you are self-sufficient.
- ▲ **FOOD.** Stock up on food and camping gear (purchase and rental) in Puerto Natales as supplies are very limited in the park.
- ▲ **ACCOMMODATION.** El Chalten is a perfect base for single day trail runs with options for accommodation and meals to suit all budgets.
- ▲ **DON'T MISS.** After your trail adventures, visit the awe-inspiring Perito Moreno Glacier near El Calafate.

### Your research starts here

- [losglaciares.com/en/calafate](http://losglaciares.com/en/calafate) (general information)
- [losglaciares.com/en/parque/#1](http://losglaciares.com/en/parque/#1) (official park website)
- [elchalten.com](http://elchalten.com) (general info and maps)
- [americahostel.com.ar](http://americahostel.com.ar) (hostel in El Calafate)
- [patagoniahostel.com.ar](http://patagoniahostel.com.ar) (hostel in El Calafate)

### Organised races

- [patagonianinternationalmarathon.com](http://patagonianinternationalmarathon.com)
- [ultra-trail-torresdelpaine.com](http://ultra-trail-torresdelpaine.com)



### BEV & RICHARD ATTFIELD

Their journey started in Belize, Central America, and has taken them through 30 countries, including South Africa. [eatrunsee.com](http://eatrunsee.com)  
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