

## This week's dream: glorious hiking in southern Patagonia

With its wildly jagged profile, Argentina's Monte Fitz Roy is one of the world's most spectacular and recognisable mountains. "Talisman-like", it attracts thousands of climbers and hikers each year to El Chaltén, the remote village at its foot, says Jonathan Franklin in the FT – a "little paradise" that, with its fabulously fresh air and clean water, could be "the world's best place to escape the confinement and claustrophobia of the Covid crisis". Rising to 3,405 metres, the summit of Fitz Roy is not a realistic goal for most visitors, but there are countless lesser climbs, as well as walks, mountain bike rides and road trips, to enjoy in this dazzling part of southern Patagonia.

In December, a new lodge, the Explora El Chaltén, opened ten miles north of the village, joining six other South American hotels in the Explora group of "expensive but exquisitely located" properties. Situated in the privately owned, 5,800-hectare Los Huemules Conservation Reserve (named in honour of an



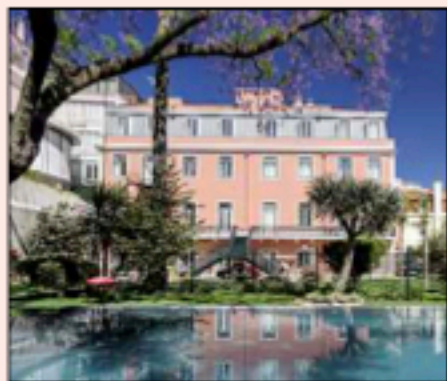
The "talisman-like" Monte Fitz Roy

endangered species of deer), it was assembled from more than 100 prefabricated parts in order to minimise disruption to its surroundings. The result is stylish and luxurious, with hardwood floors, a full spa, and huge windows affording views of snowcapped peaks.

A day-long hike from the lodge takes you through forests that ring to the "staccato soundtrack" of Magellanic woodpeckers to the Cagliero Glacier, a "tongue of ice" that descends from the peaks and dips into a glassy lake, the Laguna El Diablo. The views along the way – largely dominated by the summit of Fitz Roy – are dramatic. And a solitary cabin at the water's edge

provides a welcome midway break. It serves a good line in empanadas and has a wide selection of wines, which is impressive given that every bottle has to be "hailed over several mountain valleys" to get there. *Specialist tour operators include Scott Dunn (scottdunn.com) and Dehouche (dehouche.com).*

### Hotel of the week



#### Palácio Príncipe Real Lisbon, Portugal

Recently restored by British owners Gail and Miles Curley, this beautiful pink palacio in the heart of the Portuguese capital is "a home from home", says Tatler. There are Nespresso machines, complimentary minibars (try the ginger health shots) and fresh flowers in the 28 bedrooms, some of which have balconies, and all of which have views over the hotel's leafy gardens and heated swimming pool. Bathrooms have heated floors, large tubs, rain showers and Byredo products. Dinner, served inside or under the stars, is "simple and seasonal", and the extensive wine list is excellent.

Doubles from £250 b&b;  
[palacioprincipereal.com](http://palacioprincipereal.com).

### Getting the flavour of...

#### A meet cute in KwaZulu-Natal

They are among the "superstars" of the wildlife world – small, armoured mammals whose "waddling gait" makes them "irresistibly cute". But pangolins are also prized as a traditional ingredient in Chinese medicine, and are endangered as a result. For a guaranteed sighting, head to Phinda Private Game Reserve in South Africa, says Sarah Marshall in *The Daily Telegraph*, where a pioneering conservation project is releasing animals confiscated from poachers into the wild. Encompassing a diverse range of habitats – savannah, mountains and rare sand forest – Phinda is an ideal site, and the project has an 80% success rate in rehabilitating the creatures. Visitors help monitor and weigh them, and sometimes get to witness a release. But places are limited, so you might need to book up to a year in advance. *Mablatini Luxury Travel (mablatini.com) has a four-night trip from £4,180pp, including pangolin experience.*

#### A jewel of the Basque coast

Biarritz is France's coolest big resort "precisely because it doesn't do cool", says Anthony Peregrine in *The Sunday Times*. It has such a fine pedigree, it doesn't have to. Perched near the southern tip of France's Atlantic coast, it was a mere fishing village until Napoleon III built a summer palace there in 1854; after that, "everyone in

Europe with a title rolled in". Queen Victoria loved it, and Edward VII was a regular. Now "surfer chic" vies with the old imperial glitz, but the soul of the place – its traditional Basque life, revolving around family, food and fiestas – also remains strong. Aside from the beach, there are lovely coastal walks, fine restaurants (Les Rosiers has a Michelin star), and good hotels, including the "arty" Hôtel de Silhouette, and Napoleon's palace, now the Hôtel du Palais, which is due to reopen after a refurbishment in June.

#### Yoga in the Black Mountains

The 12th century chronicler Gerald of Wales described the Vale of Ewyas as "a wilderness far removed from the bustle of mankind", and it still feels like that now. To explore this corner of the Black Mountains in a relaxing way, female travellers could try a women's yoga and fell-walking weekend with Element Active, says Antonia Bolingbroke-Kent in *The Guardian*. It uses Llwyn Celyn, a 15th century farm owned by the Landmark Trust, as "base camp". Days begin and end with yoga sessions, and the guided walks take you across "wind-bullied uplands" and along "the runnels of old drovers' tracks". Even if women-only events aren't usually your thing, the experience can be "soul-reviving", with much "chat and cheer". *The trip costs from £275pp, excluding accommodation (element-active.co.uk).*

### Last-minute offers from top travel companies

#### Perthshire Highland safari

Spend five days exploring the Scottish wilderness from your city-centre base in Edinburgh. From £477pp b&cb, including 4 excursions. 0333-060 8768, [newmarketholidays.co.uk](http://newmarketholidays.co.uk). Depart 24 April.

#### Three nights in Lübeck

Enjoy the charming little castle Lübecker Krönchen, with a garden and sauna on site, from £351pp room-only (including Birmingham flights). 0871-277 1070, [lastminute.com](http://lastminute.com). Depart 17 March.

#### Cruise to France and Spain

Stay 14 nights on-board the Sky Princess, with stops in La Rochelle, Bilbao, Málaga and Cartagena, from £740pp cruise-only. 0343-249 6428, [cruise.co.uk](http://cruise.co.uk). Depart 9 April, from Southampton.

#### Costa Rica in 12 days

Discover the abundant nature of Costa Rica, from the Arenal volcano to the rainforests of Monteverde. From £1,499 b&cb (including Manchester flights). 020-3925 1304, [exoticca.com](http://exoticca.com). Depart 1 June.

**Covid-19:** please check government websites for testing and quarantine requirements, and the rules surrounding children ([gov.uk](http://gov.uk)).