

THE 10 BEST COUNTRIES TO VISIT IN CENTRAL AND SOUTH AMERICA



If you've been craving a vacation to an exotic, tropical destination, Central or South America may be for you. Many nations in this part of the world are safe and affordable for tourists, while offering some of the world's most unforgettable attractions. Whether you're looking for tasty food, interesting souvenirs, exciting cultural opportunities, or natural splendor, here are 10 of the best countries to visit in Central and South America.

Mexico

Every year, 29.1 million tourists from around the world descend on Mexico, making it the most popular vacation destination in all of Central and South America. Because of this, the World Economic Forum on Latin America ranks Mexico as the top tourist destination in the region. This means that Mexico has the most developed tourism infrastructure of any Latin American country and the best policies designed to promote tourism and travel. It also does the most of any Latin American country to optimize its cultural and natural resources. You'll find plenty to do in Mexico, from wandering ancient ruins, to sunning yourself on stunning beaches, to immersing yourself in the Old-World atmosphere of colonial cities.

Belize

Recent improvements to the tourist infrastructure have driven up Belize's popularity as a Latin American vacation hotspot. Belize vacations offer quaint, upscale hotels, gorgeous beaches, world-class diving, and, with its mix of Maya, Creole, mestizo, Mexican, Mennonite, Indian, Chinese, Garifuna, and Rastafarian cultures, plenty of local charm. Visit a mestizo village to learn traditional dances, or tour some of the nation's important archeological sites, including ruins of some the Maya empire's most important political hubs.

Costa Rica

This Central American country offers vacationers some of the region's most extreme biodiversity. Adventure tourism is popular here, and you'll find plenty of opportunities to tour the jungle and rainforest on canopy and zip-line tours or night hikes. Whitewater rafting and horseback riding are also popular. Top attractions include Manuel Antonio National Park, Poás Volcano, and Tortuguero National Park.

Colombia

Colombia may have a bad reputation, but those days are in its past. Today, Colombia is a beautiful, safe destination for tourists, with bustling cities, beautiful beaches, and majestic mountains. Colombia offers some of the region's most impressive biodiversity, making it a popular destination among birdwatchers; birdwatching festivals and tours are popular throughout the region.

Ecuador

This South American country is famous for being home to the Galapagos Islands, where Charles Darwin developed his theory of evolution, and where some of the world's most distinctive wildlife can be spotted. However, there's a lot more to this nation. Visit Cotopaxi National Park, where Cotopaxi volcano has erupted 50 times since 1738, enjoy world-class nightlife, or inundate yourself in the culture and views of the capital city, Quito, an UNESCO World Heritage site.

Brazil

The World Economic Forum on Latin America has ranked Brazil the second-most-popular tourist destination in the region, after Mexico. Prices here are reasonable, and infrastructure is strong — attracting tourists is a priority for the Brazilian government. Vibrant cities, the majestic Amazon Rainforest, and world-famous festivals like Carnival — Brazil has it all.

Peru

If you're an archeology buff, you may want to visit Peru to tour the Incan ruins at Cusco and Machu Picchu, or to see the famous pre-Columbian Nazca lines in the Peruvian desert. Peru is home to 28 different climates, including mountain, island, desert, and jungle ecosystems. It's also home to some of the world's most colorful festivals, impressive wildlife, and gracious hospitality.

Uruguay

Uruguay is known for its coastal villages and beaches where tourists can spot penguins, seals, sea lions, and even whales swimming offshore. Visit the Termas de Dayman in the northwestern part of the country to soak in natural thermal spas, or simply take lounge on the beach and take in the vistas that give Uruguay the nickname "the Switzerland of South America."

Argentina

If you like skiing or mountaineering, you'll love Argentina. Bariloche, a town at the foot of the Andes, offers skiing, hiking, and mountaineering opportunities, but you'll find plenty of other activities to keep you occupied in this South American nation. Plentiful national parks offer hikers the chance to see glaciers, rainforests, waterfalls, and jungle plants and animals. The capital city of Buenos Aires offers rich cultural opportunities.

Chile

Chile offers travelers a great deal of geographical diversity. It's home to the Atacama Desert, the driest non-polar desert in the world, but it also sports lush rainforests, fertile farmlands, lakes, fjords, and volcanoes. It's a popular destination with surfers, who love its world-class waves and coastal towns. Wine lovers also find a lot to enjoy in Chile's many vineyards.

Whether you want an active, adventurous vacation, or more of a laid-back, lounge-on-the-beach type of trip, Central and South America offer something for you. This part of the world offers a stunning degree of geographical and biological diversity, as well as history, culture, and cuisine to scratch your travel itch and leave you with memories to last a lifetime.

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