

FITZ ROY GRAND TOUR

Parque Nacional Los Glaciares

Argentine Patagonia

DISTANCE: 36-mile (58 km) loop

TIME: 4–7 days

PHYSICAL CHALLENGE: 1 2 3 4 5

PSYCHOLOGICAL CHALLENGE: 1 2 3 4 5

STAGING: El Chalten, Santa Cruz Province, Argentina

The profile of the Fitz Roy group—a dramatic, ascending ridge formed by the rock spires of Cerro Torre, Poincenot, St. Exupery, and the magnificent arrowhead of Fitz itself—appears out of the plain more abruptly even than that of the Grand Tetons in Wyoming. Towers of pink-tinged gray granite take your breath away, rising in impossibly sheer faces from a surrounding pedestal of ice. The eastward aspect of these storybook mountains opens onto the broad Patagonian plain, exposed to sunrises that paint them brilliant orange to blood red. It is a sublime view, a spectacle, a reason to come.

The peaks lie within the boundaries of Parque Nacional Los Glaciares, one of the biggest national parks on the continent—more than 124 miles (200 km) long with 2,000 square miles (6,000 square km) in area. World Heritage Site status was bestowed here in 1982, and if Fitz Roy is the star of the show, the big glaciers to the south are major players and actually draw more visitors. Both Lago Viedma and Lago Argentino, their waters turned by glacial sediment into a surreal blue, lap up against the ice cap where huge glaciers spill into them. These wild, windswept steppes of Patagonia harbor some of the largest bodies of ice outside the polar regions, and the flowing rivers of ice and soaring rock towers combine for an irresistible backdrop to a hiking adventure.

Explorer Francisco Moreno named Fitz Roy for the captain of Charles Darwin's famous vessel, the *Beagle*, which sailed within sight of the peak in 1834. At 11,073 feet

PRECEDING SPREAD: *The Fitz Roy group.* PHOTO BY PETER POTTERFIELD.

OPPOSITE: *Sunrise on the Fitz Roy group is reflected in shallow ponds.* PHOTO BY PETER POTTERFIELD.

