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'The reef manta rays, six feet across, soar overhead in formation like spaceships'
James Stewart dives into the Maldives

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Look ahead
Trips for 2021



25 South American escapes

Explore Patagonia in a 4x4 or take a wildlife cruise down the Amazon. Jeremy Lazell has the best escapes to start planning now

First time to South America? This grand tour is an upmarket group trip that ticks off five countries in 18 days, staying mainly in four-star hotels. Starting in Lima, you will fly to Cusco to explore the Sacred Valley and Machu Picchu, then drive across a 14,000ft Andean pass into Bolivia. Here you'll cruise Lake Titicaca by catamaran, visit the world's highest capital, La Paz, then fly to Buenos Aires. Then it's on via Montevideo to Iguazu Falls, finishing with caipirinhas in Rio de Janeiro.

Details Nineteen nights' B&B from £4,875pp, including flights and some meals. Various departures from April to November 2021 (vjv.com)

You won't find it in any brochures, but the annual Festa de Sao Bras is a mesmerising, 24-hour sambathon, held on the Unesco-protected village square in the off-beat Bahia beach resort of Trancoso. Make your base Uxua Casa, love child of a creative director at Diesel who upcycled nine derelict dilapidated cabins into a chichi, art-filled hotel. It has a shack-chic spa and thatched beach bar — the perfect four-night finale to this ten-day tour that also visits Iguaçu Falls and Rio.

Details Eleven nights' B&B from £5,995pp, including flights (audleytravel.com)



The beach bar at Uxua Casa in Trancoso, Brazil

America's Wild West never died, they say, it just moved to northern Argentina. On this one-week, self-drive loop from Salta, you will see exactly why. Following in the tyre tracks of Che Guevara whose journey down Ruta 40 was immortalised in the 2004 film *The Motorcycle Diaries*, you will drive through one-horse towns and cactus-studded plains passing burnished ochre hills and lonely whitewashed churches straight out of a spaghetti western. Travelling by 4x4, you'll stop at community-run lodges and one of the world's highest wineries, with three nights in Buenos Aires ▶

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36 Travel South America



4 Rueblito Paisa in Medellin, Colombia

Details Fifteen nights' B&B from £4,995pp, including flights and car hire (steppetravel.com)

Ten years ago you wouldn't have visited Medellín without a Kevlar vest, but Colombia's one-time cartel capital is now a poster boy of urban regeneration, with buzzing barrios, graffiti tours and vibrant arts and food scenes. Medellín is the best of the story, on the Chicalada, Colombia's Colonial and Coffee Culture group tour, which starts in Bogotá and also visits coffee plantations and colonial Villa de Leyva. You will go down a centuries-old salt mine, up a 650ft mini Sugarloaf and finish with three nights on the coast in Cartagena, Colombia's colourful Caribbean queen.

Details Fifteen nights' B&B from £4,389pp, including flights. Departs on March 7 and October 24, 2021 (journeylatinamerica.co.uk)

5 Live like a gaucho

Stay on a 6,500-acre cattle farm in the Sierras Chicas, riding across the rolling Argentinian grasslands north of Cordoba. It's owned and run by Anglo-Argentinians whose family have farmed this land for four generations, and this trip is based on a 16th-century ranch house, Estancia Los Potreros, with five simple, elegant rooms and a fun of-line together-house-party vibe. Guests of all abilities ride as much or as little as they like (poolside hammocks and green awns cry out for days off) and can help gauchos to count cattle and bring in young horses from hills frequented by pumas.

Details Nine nights' full board from £2,801pp, including flights (inthesaddle.com)

reached only after three hours by boat through a foreverness of Amazon rainforest roughly the size of Austria, Tambopata Research Centre in Peru is where the BBC filmed nacaws for David Attenborough's recent series, *Seven Worlds, One Planet*. It's proper scientific research base, so you end up drinking pisco sours with entomology professors after night walks,

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but it also has a stylish tourist wing, with rooms open to the chatter of howler monkeys and parrots from the surrounding forest. It's a stunning three-night add-on to this exploration of Cusco, the Sacred Valley and Machu Picchu.

Details Eleven nights from £3,116pp, including flights and most meals (journeylatinamerica.co.uk)

Eight miles from Machu Picchu, Skydive is the most exhilarating hotel in South America. It's made up of three Perseus pods that cling to the cliffs 1200ft over the Sacred Valley. You reach Skydive by a 90-minute via ferrata ascent, and guests return to the valley floor by zip wire. In other words, adventurephobes need not apply for this trip, which also includes sections of the Lares trek, a walking tour of Cusco's colonial highlights, and a non-negotiable in these parts – a visit to Machu Picchu.

Details Fourteen nights' B&B from £410Opp, including flights and Skydive meals (scottddn.com)

8 Tango in Buenos Aires

Learn to tango in the place where it first stamped its heels on this Ultimate Tango Holiday to Buenos Aires. Born in the brothels and bars along the River Plate, the dance still pulses through the city's streets, so on this dedicated tango week you will have lessons by day – and classes at the top-end *milongas* in a historic building in the Almagro district – then strut your stuff in *milongas* (dance halls) by night. You will see street tango in Calle Florida and watch the legendary *Carlos Gardel* show in the ornate belle époque theatre in Galería Güemes.

Details Nine nights; B&B from £1,999pp; includes flights (airtours.co.uk).

A six-hour trek along the last seven miles of the Inca Trail to Machu Picchu is the standout selfie opportunity on this family group tour, but the whole trip is Insta gold. Aimed at families with children aged 11 and over, the action-packed Adventure in



16 Corocora Camp in Casanare, Colombia



18 Moai on Easter Island, Chile



12 Salar de Talar. In Chile's Atacama Desert

The Foreign Office currently advises against all non-essential travel. All the trips listed here are for 2021, with specific dates given where applicable.

the Andes also includes a visit to a llama sanctuary, biking along the Urubamba River to Pisac's colourful Sunday market, a spectacular journey by train down the Sacred Valley from Machu Picchu to Cusco, and paddleboarding on the Huaypo lagoon at the foot of the snowcapped Andes.

Details Nine nights' B&B from £2,699pp

(children £2,449pp), including flights. Departs on April 4, July 31 or August 21, 2021 (familiesworldwide.com)

Guinea-pig kebabs, alpaca spotting, a canoe safari through the Amazon and a one-day shopping group family trip is one long Tik Tok opportunity. Ecuador Volcanoes and Jungle begins in Quito, features a journey by rail to the Equator (one-foot-in-each-hemisphere seats mandatory), then on via Palapaalta hot springs to a rainforest lodge, where children can learn to fire blowpipes between river safaris. At the Avenue of Volcanoes you will hike into a crater and spend a night in a village home. Kayaking, rafting and mountain biking are also available.

Details: Fifteen nights' B&B from £2,500pp (children £2,050pp), including flights and some meals (stubbornmuletravel.com)

11 Track down jaguars in Brazil

lakes and marshes, rivers and canals sheltering tapirs and giant anteaters, river otters and more than 650 bird species, as well as the highest concentration of crocodiles on the planet. Not only that, but it is more open than the Amazon and therefore the best place to spot — and photograph — jaguars. This Wildlife of the Pantanal group trip stays at three lodges, including Jaguar Retreat.