



## Destination Spotlight: South America

By Ashley Kosciolek

The South America/Panama Canal region plays a crucial role in making several cruise itineraries possible. Cruise guests may explore the continent on South America-focused cruises that visit such key port cities as Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aires or destinations such as the Chilean Fjords. They may explore the continent on world cruises, some sailing around Cape Horn at the southernmost tip of the continent. Or they may experience the continent on Caribbean and South America itineraries visiting, for instance, Colombia and Central American countries.

Adventurous travelers might opt for a bucket list expedition cruise to the Galapagos Islands or visit Argentina or Chile as gateways to Antarctica. Others might hop on a river ship, sailing along the Peruvian Amazon or Colombia's Magdalena River.

Panama Canal itineraries embarking from ports in Florida or California, offering cruisers a first-hand look at an engineering marvel as they sail through the legendary waterway. Cruise lines traverse the canal seasonally as they reposition vessels from Florida to the Pacific Coast and Alaska, while providing guests access to, for instance, Colombia, Panama, Costa Rica, Belize, Guatemala, and Mexico.

According to [Cruise Lines International Association \(CLIA\)](#), in 2025, 1.20 million\* cruisers sailed in the South America/Panama Canal region, making the region the 8th largest cruise destination in the world (\*The number does not include the Galapagos Islands).

In addition to international appeal, South America has strong regional appeal. According to CLIA, in 2025, 1.12 South Americans took an ocean-going cruise, many staying close to home in South America or the Caribbean.

### A Perfect Winter Destination

Most South American countries are in the southern hemisphere and remain warm all year due to their tropical climate. Even the region's coldest temperature locations are at their warmest between November and March – which is winter in the northern hemisphere. South America during this time provides the opportunity for those from northern regions to escape the chill.

Brazil's Rio de Janeiro, Santos and Salvador; Lima, Peru; Argentina's Buenos Aires; Chile's Valparaiso and Santiago; and Uruguay's Montevideo and Punta del Este, are featured cruise ports on world cruises and other South America itineraries. The Falkland Islands offer a bit of British flavor in the region, and the mighty Amazon as it runs through Peru provides opportunity to explore inland on a fascinating river cruise. River cruise line AmaWaterways

recently inaugurated the Magdalena River in Colombia as a new cruising destination in South America.

Ecuador's lush and largely untouched Galapagos Islands archipelago is a prime expedition cruise region, featuring animals like giant tortoises, marine iguanas, sea lions, Galapagos penguins and Darwin's finches, which you won't find anywhere else in the world. Most islands are uninhabited and cruise lines such as Celebrity Cruises, HX Expeditions, and Silversea Cruises ferry passengers ashore in inflatable boats for wet landings that take them straight onto the sands of pristine beaches. Many passengers begin their cruises with a visit to Guayaquil or Quito, Ecuador. A popular add-on is an inland visit Peru's Machu Picchu.

With sailings starting in South America, Antarctica, a key bucket-list destination for intrepid cruisers – with its icy landscapes, penguins and whales, is most easily reached by ship. Passengers have several options for embarkation. The most common include boarding the ship in Ushuaia, Argentina, for a sailing across the Drake Passage. A newer option is flying from Chile to King George Island, in the South Shetland Islands, to board a vessel. Silversea is opening a hotel in Puerto Williams, Chile, to accommodate its guests. Quark Expeditions offers a fly-cruise program originating in Punta Arenas, Chile.

### **A Partnership Made in Paradise**

With their presence, cruise lines contribute significantly to local economies in the region. Cruise lines pay port fees, employ local personnel, and partner with shore excursion providers in the locations the vessels frequent. The direct, indirect, and induced impacts from cruise activity on the Brazil economy alone is more than \$1 billion.

More than a dozen CLIA member lines – including MSC Cruises, Costa Cruises, Holland America Line, Oceania Cruises, Princess Cruises, Ponant Explorations, Azamara Cruises, Regent Seven Seas Cruises, Scenic Luxury Cruises & Tours, and Seabourn – regularly visit South America.

A spokesperson for MSC Cruises, which has the largest market share in South America, notes the variety of itineraries, intuitive hospitality and culture are important draws in the market, and contribute to South America being a standout destination.

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