

Cheap Places in South America & Budget Travel Tips



by Molly McHugh

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1st Edition

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Introduction

Who We Are

My son Blake and I lived and traveled in South America for four and a half years. We have been to all the locations described here except two (Baños and Cotacachi), and have lived for an extended amount of time in many of them; a few months up to one year.

We moved to South America in 2007 after living in Mexico (Mazatlan and Baja) for three years. It took around 18 months journeying through Mexico and Central America via bus (mainly... a couple short plane and boat trips) but we made it... arriving in Colombia in October, 2008.



"A couple photos from our grand, one-day trip to the Salar de Uyuni, Bolivia. In the one day trip from Uyuni you get to see the train cemetery, a salt hotel with museum, Colchani salt processing in action and drive on the

salar to Isla del Pescado for lunch to hike and take a zillion photos. Price is only \$30 USD per person and includes lunch. We took Tiger (sigh) who was borrowed by a group of tourists for photos. He did not cooperate (shocking), bit one of the sweet Australian gals hand and as a result had his modeling career come to a mercifully short end. Buster stayed behind to guard our hotel room.”

We are budget travelers, and travel with two small dogs in tow. Our Rat Terrier who is now 13 years old we started out with (purchased in the U.S.) and the other – 3 year old Tiger the Chihuahua-mix terror – was a Christmas present for my son, bought in Ecuador. Yes, that's a bit crazy but it's how we do things in our family. If you'd like to know how to purchase a puppy in Quito, shoot me an email :)

During our adventure my son attended schools in Mexico and Guatemala but primarily homeschooled. He took private guitar lessons and art classes in Sucre, Bolivia. He was welcomed on sports teams (soccer, rugby) in Argentina and learned to surf in Huanchaco, Peru.

He not only learned how to ride a horse in Tupiza, Bolivia... he made friends with the guides, helped care for the horses during our month stay and worked as a guide for the company, taking other tourists out on trips. An all-around great kid, he loved Argentina the most out of all the countries we visited.

I worked part-time as a travel writer, completing an eBook on living in Baja, then blogging and writing articles for various online publications. In South America I was hired

for a few traditional guidebook gigs, then branched-out solo creating South America Living website.

Blake and I both love taking photographs, I hope you enjoy the pics we've added to this content. There are over 1000 more on the website, plus many videos. Our YouTube channel is located [here](#).

As 'head of household' single Mom, I focused on stretching our limited budget (approximately \$1600 USD per month) to include as much fun and extra-curricular activities as possible. That included trips to the Salar de Uyuni, Bolivia; Iguazu Falls, Argentina; Colca Canyon, Peru; Patagonia and the Galapagos Islands amidst our long-term stays in varied locations.

Where We've Been

We spent a year in Miramar - small town on the Atlantic coast of Argentina near Mar del Plata - and close to a year in the town of La Paloma on the Atlantic coast of Uruguay. We opened a hostel briefly in La Paloma (2010).

In addition, we have had extended stays of one to three months in the following places: Cusco, Peru; Montanita, Ecuador; Paracas, Peru; Esquel, Argentina; Huanchaco, Peru; Sucre, Bolivia; Copacabana, Bolivia; Tupiza, Bolivia; Canoa, Ecuador and Yanque, Peru in the Colca Canyon.

We have traveled extensively throughout Argentina,

Ecuador, Bolivia and Peru. We have visited Colombia for an approximate 3 week cross-country trip, leaving Panama by plane and landing in Ecuador via bus, but have yet to visit Brazil.

Many folks hear this and ask us “how the heck did you do it?” That is why I wrote this eBook – to explain the how and have it serve as a reference for others.

Housing costs are the biggest factor in affordability. The less you pay for rent or a hotel room means more cash for meals out, arranged tours and short trips around the country. It also dictates the length of your trip or amount of time you can spend living abroad. The locations selected for this eBook all have low-cost housing and hostals available.

I rarely paid over \$12 USD per night in a hostel and at times as little as \$5 - \$8 USD for the two of us, plus our dogs. Our furry, four-legged friends were welcomed throughout South America (in hostals, on trains, busses and planes), as long as they had a current health certificate and proof of rabies vaccine.

The most I have paid for rent was \$300 USD per month for a two-bedroom bungalow two blocks from the beach in Uruguay (2010). We had a two-bedroom, 1 and 1/2 bath apartment in a nice, central location in Miramar, Argentina for \$240 USD (2009).

Prices have risen but the area is still affordable. Now, three years later, I would expect to pay around \$300 - \$400 USD monthly for a small, furnished apartment in

Argentina, \$450 and up for a two-bedroom apartment or house. Cheaper options can be found in Ecuador, Bolivia and Peru.



"The two best buddies Tiger and Buster busy guarding our rental house in Uruguay and in the other photo waiting patiently to fly out of Ecuador."

Besides the availability of affordable housing, I chose a location based on the 'fun factor' i.e. enjoyable things to do and see that were within our budget. I researched the relative safety of the area for adults and children beforehand as well. For information on safety and health risks [click here](#).

I would love to live in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil or Santiago, Chile for an extended time with my son but we can't afford it. And it would be very difficult for someone with a baseline monthly budget of \$800 USD to as well.

That is why Brazil and Chile are not included in this eBook, they are not cheap destinations to live or travel in; a minimum of \$1000 USD per month would be needed to

live or travel comfortably. It is next to impossible to work in South America, unless you have a chunk of cash to invest in setting-up your own business.

The locations highlighted here are for folks who want to travel or live in South America but have to work within a limited budget - like us.

It can be done, it can be fun... you just need to know where and how plus have the gumption to get off the couch, make a change and take risks. And it doesn't have to be forever.

A year-long sabbatical is a great alternative to the 'digital nomad' lifestyle that is all the rage currently. Or four months traveling as a family, or six months studying Spanish, or... think about what is right for you, not what the status quo says you should do.

Why Read This eBook

Following the guidelines listed in the Budget Travel Tips section below and visiting some of the lower cost destinations I illustrate in the Cheap Places to Live and Cheap Places to Travel chapters will help you plan an adventure in South America on a budget.

You will also get to experience much of what it has to offer: beautiful beaches and mountain highlands; friendly people; interesting new foods and cultures that vary from country to country... whatever you can imagine. Most

likely it is already there.

Throughout this eBook are links to additional related information that is on our website such as price charts of grocery store items, how to rent an apartment, travel guides... anything that may be of interest to you.



"What I love about this photo is that the sweet, elderly local woman was actually very ratty and ragged looking, yet it only shows her beauty and kind spirit. She was very shy but happy to get a few soles for letting me snap a pic as I sat in an outdoor café table in Chivay, Peru."

Need visa information? [Click here.](#)

Need online travel guides with recommended places to stay, eat and things to do for all budget levels? [Click here.](#)

How about cost of living information? [Click here](#).

When you click on the link to go to the website, you can easily click back to this eBook. With this eBook and the South America Living website at your disposal, you should have all the information you need to plan your journey.

If I can assist you in any way I will. Just send a note via email or the website. Safe travels, Molly

Email: editor@southamericaliving.com

Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/southamericaliving>

Twitter: [@mollymchugh](https://twitter.com/mollymchugh)

Cheap Places to Live

These are featured locations that are great for someone on a monthly budget of \$800 USD or more. For a couple it would be around \$1200 USD per month. You won't live like a king or queen on that amount, but life can be enjoyable and just being in a foreign country is exciting in and of itself.

More money always means more fun but we are proof that you can have an adventure in South America with limited means and still do extra activities that are more pricey, you just have to plan well and save just as you would back home.



“Colorful Hats and Scarves on Sale at Colchani.”

Salta, Argentina

Salta is heavy on the Argentina to Bolivia tourist circuit and a great place to touch down for a year or so as well. If you like city life with a small town feel, you will love Salta. Parks and plazas weave throughout the town with numerous shops, restaurants and ways to get yourself into trouble i.e. things to do!

Things To Do in Salta

- Ride the Gondola to the top of San Bernardo Mountain (called El Teleférico).
- Sunday artist's street market (Balcarce street) to hobnob with local artists and check out their work.
- Visit nearby traditional village San Lorenzo (10 minutes by taxi).
- Visit the Quebrada de Humahuaca (5 hours by bus).
- Learn about mummies at the Museo de Arqueología de Alta Montana.
- Enjoy an evening listening to folkloric music and Peña entertainment (live shows on Balcarce street).

Last but not least (though very expensive) is the most known tourist attraction in Salta - The Train to the Clouds. The 15 hour adventure includes traversing 29 bridges, 21

tunnels, 13 viaducts, 2 spirals, and 2 zigzags.

Salta has a cosmopolitan feel though not the corresponding ramped-up prices such as in capital city Buenos Aires. Even high-end restaurants lining the main plaza - Plaza 9 de Julio - offer regular specials and set meals i.e. "menu del dia". On offer one day was 13 empanadas (large with chicken) plus a liter of beer or soda for only 22 pesos (\$5.40 USD).

Smaller, local establishments in less touristy areas have daily set menus for 11-18 pesos (\$2.70-\$4.40 USD) that include soup or salad, main dish (meatloaf, roasted chicken), bread and dessert (cup of jello or other).

The Super Vea is the main supermarket in town, with a wide selection of products and imported goods.



"Salta is lovely to walk around in, with green spaces everywhere. This is a

shot of Plaza del Lago (Lake Plaza), a sweet little lake with paddle boats to rent. It is just across the street from the entrance to El Teleferico where you can ride the gondola up to the top of San Bernardo mountain; a fun, low-cost alternative to the pricey Train to the Clouds."

There is an actual 'shopping' (shopping mall in English) in Salta with a McDonald's and various shops - yet mainly pricey items. Street shopping (rows and rows of shops) is the best way to find a bargain.

Click here for more info: [Shopping in Salta](#)

Your biggest hurdle in moving to Salta will be finding an inexpensive rental. There are apartments to be had for \$300 USD per month but you will need to search in outlying areas and visit Inmobiliarias (real estate offices) for available options.

Renting in Argentina can be complicated for a foreigner, but if you rent through an Inmobiliaria they usually take care of most of the details for you and handle the contract for the owner. When you find places in a newspaper and call, often the owner of the home will direct you to the real estate office who is handling the rental.

For detailed information on renting an apartment or house in Argentina [click here](#).

Things You Will Love Living in Salta

- Local, 'small town' feel yet a mid-sized city with plenty to see and do. International tourists pass through

regularly offering more character & folks to interact with.

- Proximity to Chile & Bolivia make it easy to update your Tourist Visa every three months.
- Many options for shopping and eating out cheaply, especially the 'menu del dia' set meal option at lunchtime.

Things You May Not Like Living in Salta

- Due to its popularity, apartments in central areas are going to be cost-prohibitive on a \$800 USD per month budget. You will have to look in outlying areas for low-cost rentals. For some folks this will be a plus as they would rather live a few blocks away from the main city action anyways in a quieter area with a more 'local neighborhood' type feel.
- Winters are mild (19 degrees C / 66 F on average) but summertime (December to March) brings heavy rains and frequent thunderstorms.
- Prices – and the crime rate – seem to be steadily rising in Argentina (2012). The great deal you got during your first year living there may become not such a great deal from the second year on.

Miramar, Argentina

Any traveler who has ventured within its borders the last couple of years will exclaim emphatically: "Argentina is no longer cheap!" And they are correct.

As a whole, the country is slowly but surely gaining pesos to peso with its expensive neighbors Chile (to the west) and Uruguay (to the northeast) yet there are still a few desirable locations to hunker down for a year or two. A reasonable budget for Miramar would be \$1000 USD per month.

You may have never heard of Miramar, Argentina before (unless you are a die-hard surfer) but most likely you have heard of Mar del Plata, Argentina - popular summer resort on Argentina's Atlantic coast just five hours from Buenos Aires.

Miramar is a short 40 minute drive (45 km/28 miles) from Mar del Plata (and its upscale shopping & vibrant nightlife) and has hourly bus service to and from Mar del Plata as well as first class direct service to Buenos Aires (6 hours), Bariloche (25 hours) and other tourist hot spots.

Miramar is a great small town to live with for an extended time with children; affectionately called "The City of Children". There is a skate park, swimming pool, gyms with youth classes, soccer leagues, etc.

A small casino and a few local pubs (many in summer) keep the adults happy most weekends (and weeknights!). The two local cinemas are open full-time only in summer

with some weekend showings (and live entertainment) in winter.

However, Mar del Plata has two shopping malls, both with multiplex movie theaters and an abundance of nightclubs and live show theatres.



"Miramar is where we first settled when we arrived in Argentina in 2009. A family-oriented town on the Atlantic coast, it is tranquil during the winter, crazy with tourists during the summer months from Christmas to the end of January. Bikes are a common form of transit; you see even elderly men and women up into their 70s riding bikes - some by choice, others simply because the cost of owning a car in Argentina is so outrageously expensive they cannot afford it."

There is crime and violent offenses do occur but are rare. In 2011 a teen was stabbed to death and posters with his photograph demanding justice - Justicia por Emiliano! - were plastered all over town, in cab windows, on doors of private homes. The offenders were caught by police. Important to note is that crime in Argentina is increasing throughout the country. In the past two years many older retirees have moved to Miramar to escape the high-level of crime in Buenos Aires.

More information on crime & safety in Argentina is [here](#).

You can rent a studio or one-bedroom apartment for \$300 - \$400 USD per month, two to three-bedroom house or apartment for \$500 - \$600 USD.

To find a low-cost rental you must search outside of the high-season summer months December to March. Prices triple during this time.

More information on renting including what a 'guarantee' is can be found [here](#).

Best Places to Grocery Shop in Miramar

There is a chain supermarket - Toledos - yet your best bet to find budget deals and fill your bags full of all you need is to head to the intersection of Calle 19 and Diagonal Fortuna de la Plaza streets.

On the corner is Autoservicio Venezia, a small store with a tight-squeeze getting through the aisles yet chock-full of

every deli item you could wish for and all the basics plus many imported items. It also has a large wine and spirits selection.

Next door to Venezia you have a bakery, then three doors down a carniceria (meat market in English) and huge fruit and vegetable kiosk across the street.

Two of the most popular take-out shops (no seating areas, only food to go) are located at this intersection as well – Grass with tortas, quiche, salads, pizzas, etc. and La Cocina de Mama - a rotiseria and parrilla with cooked meats, chicken, mashed potatoes, vegetable dishes, etc. sold by the kilo.

An espresso will cost approximately \$1.75 USD and liter of Quilmes or Brahma beer only \$1.75 USD (bought at a store, restaurant price around \$4 USD).

A meal in a restaurant runs from \$7 USD (choose the 'menu del dia' for best value) to \$10 USD per person. You can purchase a bottle of wine for \$2 USD and there are many specialty foods shops (including organic/wholefood shops great for vegetarians) - some closed during the winter months.

If you need a cadre of English-speaking expats awaiting your arrival in Miramar you will not find it. There are few English-speakers and only a handful of expats located in the area.

It is a very traditional Argentine balneario (seaside resort) with many families and elderly living full-time but the bulk

of the houses owned by wealthy Argentines who visit in the summer.

Things You Will Love Living in Miramar

- The city of Mar del Plata - and its shopping & nightlife - only 40 minutes away.
- Miles of Atlantic ocean shoreline virtually vacant during the winter but bustling with summer fun January & February.
- One of the safer locations in Argentina for families, many kid-friendly activities and locals to interact with.
- Small casino for small-time gamblers!

Things You May Not Like Living in Miramar

- No large English-speaking community like you have in Buenos Aires, Mendoza and Bariloche. There is a small church group with missionaries from the U.S., but not many expats.
- It is a very traditional Argentine town geared towards families, and small. How welcomed you will be living there full time depends on many factors, but speaking the language is a must.
- Winters are cold with bone-chilling wet weather and

strong winds. Great time to hop on the bus and play in the snow at Bariloche (direct service from Miramar, 25 hours) or Esquel (an additional 3 hours from Bariloche)!

Sucre, Boliva

Great for a visit or a low-cost, long-term stay... Sucre, Bolivia may be the only capital city in South America that fits this profile. It may also be one of the few larger cities where you can not only live off of \$650 USD per month but have a little left over to take trips to other areas of the country.

The city is compact with plenty of traffic congestion (both pedestrian and auto) yet full of green spaces as well. The main square in Sucre is Plaza 25 de Mayo but if you wander off four to five blocks in any direction you are most likely going to come across another flower-filled oasis.

Other than tourists highlights, long-term visitors will have an array of classes at their disposal: learning Spanish at a language school; taking drawing or painting lessons at the Casa de la Cultura and cultural events (film and music festivals). Posters of upcoming events are plastered on windows and doors of cafes and restaurants throughout the city.

Huge farmer's markets are a main draw for visitors to Sucre, and a great place for low-cost shopping. For information, photographs and a video [click here](#).

The city has two grocery stores, for information on both including a price chart of commonly purchased food items, [click here](#).

How to Get a Three-course Lunch for Only 12

Bolivianos (\$1.75 USD)

Set meal lunches ("El Menú del Día" in Spanish) that comprise soup, a main course, drink, dessert and bread are dirt cheap throughout South America but in Sucre are an even more amazing bargain. If you pay for two weeks or a month in advance you can get up to a 30% discount.



"Markets in Sucre are a highlight of any visit. This is a shot of the main farmer's market in town, a three-storied extravaganza containing about every food item you would want, all with their own sections (a fresh bread section, dried spices section, meat section, line of shops selling chicken side by side, etc.) and three main food courts plus a fresh juice stand section. Overwhelmingly fun to visit."

As an example, the popular vegetarian restaurant El Germen (231 Calle San Alberto) offers a month of lunches for 310 bolivianos (\$45 USD) or two weeks worth for only

155 bolivianos (\$22.50 USD).

Want to know what's cooking at El Germen? Here are a couple of lunch menus shared by a writer from England on sabbatical in Sucre: "Today we had vegetable soup with wheat, vegetable bocaditos with creamed rice, pineapple cream for dessert and tumbo juice. Yesterday was tomato soup, stuffed pepper and salad, banana cake and juice."

If you want to try a lunch before committing to more, the daily price is 18 bolivianos (\$2.60 USD). El Germen is a vegetarian restaurant, but meat lovers can find a similar arrangement at another establishment. Find a place you like and then try to make a deal.

Low-cost Efficiency Apartments Near the Market

Want to land in Sucre and stay for an extended visit? Four blocks from the market towards the bus terminal is a building with many apartments available for rent - Villa La Plata Guest House.

They have efficiency studios (small kitchen with a few pots & pans, linen), one and two bedroom units with street-side balconies and a rooftop apartment with private patio. You can just show up and see what is available - the friendly owner lives next door.

Prices depend on the unit and number of people but start as low as \$170 USD per month, including all utilities. The one drawback is there are a lot of stairs and no elevator. Address: 369 Ancieto Arce street.

Finding an apartment or house is very easy in Sucre, and there are Inmobiliarios (real estate offices) to help you. Unlike in Argentina and Uruguay, you do not need to pay a hefty deposit upfront, just the first and last months rent.

For more information on renting an apartment or house in Bolivia [click here](#).

You can find furnished two-bedroom apartments with private patio (nice, central location) or an unfurnished 3-4-bedroom house (safe neighborhood near the center) for \$300 - \$500 USD per month.

When the realtor looks at you and says "es amueblado" he or she means "comes with furniture". Another way to say "with furniture" in Spanish is "con muebles". Without furniture is "sin muebles".

You definitely want to have a place partially-furnished, as new furniture is expensive; then add your own personal touch with new bedding (that you will be expected to provide), tapestries (head to the market!), etc.

Things You Will Love Living in Sucre

- Availability of low-cost temporary or long-term rentals in town center, within walking distance of all amenities.
- Grocery shopping. In addition to gigantic Mercado Central, there is Pompeya with a large selection of

imported and gourmet foods. Craving stir-fry? Buy a jar of garlic black bean sauce at Pompeya. Need some snacks? How about flavored gourmet popcorn?

- Steady flow of cultural events in addition to monthly offerings for those with an artistic bent at lovely Casa de la Cultura.

Things You May Not Like Living in Sucre

- Exhaust fumes. Everyone in Sucre seems to own a car and drive it 24/7. Black plumes of smoke passing from exhaust pipe to your nostrils is all too common when walking in Sucre.
- Internet service can be spotty, making working online (and SKYPE calls) difficult. Best -and often only place in town - to make a SKYPE call is the Internet cafe across from Plazuela Santa Cruz at Mercado Central on Ravelo street. If you buy service to your new apartment or rental house, you should have no difficulties.

Cotacachi, Ecuador

Healing mecca, mountain paradise, expat haven - the small town of Cotacachi, Ecuador (population around 9000) is racking up a slew of complimentary titles as well as attracting retirees from the U.S. and elsewhere in droves.

Located approximately 2 hours from the capital city Quito the village is well known for its hand-crafted leather products. Methods of tanning, stretching and molding the leather skins have been passed down through the generations and perfected into an art.

It is small town living but with plenty of natural attractions nearby to enjoy.

Things To Do in Cotacachi

- The Cotacachi Cayapas Ecological Reserve - can hike to the summit of Cotacachi Volcano which lies at 4,935m (16,200 feet).
- Lake Cuicocha (Laguna Cuicocha in Spanish) - volcanic crater lake located in the Cotacachi Cayapas Ecological Reserve. Surrounded by hills you can hike along its shores or take a boat ride around the lake.
- Lake San Pablo (Laguna San Pablo) - largest lake in Ecuador - approximately 4 km (2.4 miles) wide. During Fiesta del Yamor (annually in September) boat races are held on the lake as well as a swim

competition where participants grease their bodies to withstand water temperatures of 40-50 degrees. Brrr!

- Peguche Waterfall - highlight of the indigenous village of the same name - Peguche - located approximately an hour and a half from Cotacachi. Also popular are its gigantic stands of eucalyptus.

And of course the capital city Quito with an abundance of things to do and see.

It costs only \$2 USD to travel from Cotacachi to Quito. It is a 2 hour journey with busses leaving from the Otavalo bus terminal every 30 minutes. The bus from Cotacachi to Otavalo is just 15 cents for the 20 minute ride.

One expat from the U.S. who has lived in Cotacachi for a few years and owns an apartment building in the town - Phil Ware - writes this about what's on for fun:

"There always seems to be some type of celebration going on usually with great music. As more expats arrive there are activities like horseback riding, girls night out, dance classes, cheese factory tours, dinners at a 350 year old hacienda, etc".

The majority of expats are attracted by the bargain real estate deals as much as they are the low cost of living, peaceful environment and people. Yet inexpensive rentals are available for those who are living on a \$800 USD per month budget.

We have a cost of living page that includes pricing

information for a doctor's visit, dental care, transportation and grocery items. There is a price chart for goods bought in one of the two supermarkets in the area - Tia & SuperMaxi (in Ibarra 30 minutes by bus) - as well as at the local farmer's market. It is located [here](#).

Things You Will Love Living in Cotacachi

- Ecuador is a budget traveler's dream. Folks with limited cash moving to Cotacachi will be able to visit other areas of the country easily (bus transport, staying in hostals).
- Surrounding natural beauty that is easily accessible to tourists (and relocatees!).

Things You May Not Like Living in Cotacachi

- It may be best if you are a 'love thy neighbor' kind of person if moving to Cotacachi full-time. There won't be a lot of them... and you will see them often :)
- Cultural activities are 2 hours away in Quito (shopping mall, museums, etc.) - might be a bit far for those used to living in a large, metropolitan area.

Vilcabamaba, Ecuador

Supposedly the longevity claims that made Vilcabamba famous - of folks lasting 110 years plus - have been debunked (National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, MD in 1978) yet that doesn't seem to slow down the influx of foreigners wanting to relocate to the area and call it home.



"The main square of Vilcabamba is the center of action, with a small Mom & Pop grocery store, café with WiFi, bakery and restaurants on its four sides. There were two men sitting on a park bench whom I first tried to get a shot of and they shied away. This gentleman on the bench across from them was happy to have his photo taken, putting on a bit of a show."

"Valley of Longevity" or just lovely valley in a beautiful

natural setting with a year-round temperate climate? Either way, Vilcabamba attracts full and part-time foreign residents from around the world and according to local realtors is growing at a rapid pace.

What's There To Do in Vilcabamba?

Chill-out, have a leisurely lunch at one of the restaurants lining the main square or a few blocks away, visit with friends, chill-out some more, enjoy your home environment and maybe get an hour of gardening in. Then have an evening drink in town or dinner with friends, chill-out some more... if getting cold, put on a sweater. How about a poker game or dancing?

For those needing more structured playtime - or just in town for a short visit - there is the Parque Nacional Podocarpus (national park) nearby and one-day horseback riding tours of the park (9 a.m. to 4 p.m. lunch included) for \$35 USD.

One tour operator is Luis who can be found at the restaurant Los Coqueiros at the plaza. He also offers 4 hour guided tours of the La Ruta del Sol, lunch included, for \$25 USD.

Vilcabamba is not for 'rushed souls', but for those who can truly embrace having little on their plate in regards to important matters to attend to and yet be self-fulled just the same. Retirees and 40-somethings plus make up the bulk of non-Ecuadorians... single, married with or without children.

When visiting the town for three days (January, 2012), we met a lovely family that relocated from Northern Canada with their two sons and are currently opening up a new restaurant just off the main square. And a guy named Dusty who hails from New York, USA and doesn't seem to be heading back 'home' anytime soon.

You can meet cool folks like this and many more by visiting the main watering hole (the only one really, I was told) in town, Shanty's Bar located 'over the bridge' and open from around 3 p.m. to midnight... depending...

Are There Places to Shop in Vilcabamba?

Not many. There are a couple small shops selling basic grocery items with very few imported products (cheeses, wine, packaged goods): Supermercado Marisol located at the main square and Mini-Market El, located on Fernando de La Vega street a block from the square.

There are a couple of bakeries in town with the one rumored to have the best banana bread - Pasteleria Pacha Pan - located a half block off the main square across from the elementary school on Calle Bolivar - open from 7:30 a.m. to 9 p.m.

Cheap Eats & Restaurants in Vilcabamba

The Juice Factory on the main square has smoothies, peanut butter truffles and soup and salad at lunchtime.

Restaurant Terraza, kitty corner on the other side of the square, has Filet Mignon in mushroom sauce, shrimp fajitas, greek and Mexican salads plus a delicious "Spaghetti a la Carbonara with Bacon" for only \$5 USD.

Large plates (or take-out) of savory Rotisserie chicken plus french fries with homemade mayonnaise and hot sauce can be found at the street side restaurant with no name... located two blocks from the bus terminal at Eterna Juventud and Juan Montalvo streets.

There is a Sunday brunch from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. at La Roca, one of the more upscale, pricier places in town. For around \$8 USD you can feast on 6-7 types of salads, 3 types of gourmet meat dishes, fried rice, veggies, 2-3 desserts and includes a drink. Located around 4 blocks from the plaza near the police station.

How to Find Cheap Rentals in Vilcabamba

There are rentals available for as low as \$200 per month... basic, unfurnished small houses near town or 15 minutes away. Your best bet is to land in the town and then visit one of the real estate offices around the main square.

There is an apartment building that was created specifically for foreigners looking to relocate to Vilcabamba - La Casa Armarilla - opened by a Canadian couple who spent months trying to find an available rental years ago and now spend their time helping newcomers to the area settle comfortably.

Two real estate companies in town have rentals, both with offices at the main plaza – MCR Real Estate and VREC Real Estate. Properties listed online will be in the high-range over \$350 USD per month but you can find older, fixer-upper type abodes for less if you visit the offices in person or email an inquiry.

How To Get Cash in Vilcabamba

There is an International LINK ATM in town to get cash off of your debit or credit card and many banks in Loja, just an hour away via bus, less if driving. The bus company Vilcabambaturis has departures to Loja every 15 minutes from the bus terminal.

What You Will Love Living in Vilcabamba

- Serenity and peaceful living for those who like that kind of thing plus as a bonus - a low crime rate.
- Lots of English-speakers to talk to and make friends with, including local Ecuadorians who speak some English.
- The city of Loja an easy 1 hour bus ride away, with grocery stores, banks, etc. Busses leave the main bus terminal every 15 minutes, and from the terminal in Loja (heading back to Vilcabamba) every 1/2 hour.

What You May Not Like Living in Vilcabamba

- Money is flowing into the area by those who have it and are buying up real estate which may make the chasm between those who have and those who do not much greater in the years to come.
- A fairly strong 'casual drug use culture' that may or may not appeal to a prospective relocatee. San Pedro is a native hallucinogenic plant abundant in the area that many take to facilitate spiritual growth, or simply for the fun of it.

Huanchaco, Peru

Huanchaco, Peru is a popular surfing spot. This Pacific coast town is also a popular location for Peruvians and International travelers on holiday seeking some time in the sun and sand - while offered cold drinks and snacks from friendly local beach vendors.



"Surfing is the main gig in town. There is a break off the beach that is great for beginners and for more experienced surfers the famous town of Chicama claimed to have the world's longest wave just 1 1/2 hours away. I usually ask if I can take a shot beforehand, as you can tell, these guys were happy to oblige!"

Located on Peru's Pacific coast approximately 300 miles (483 km) north of Lima. You can bus to the town from Lima (8.5 hours) or fly into Trujillo Airport; a 1 hour flight.

There is no better depiction of the laid-back, traditional Peruvian culture present in Huanchaco than the reed boats ("Caballitos de Totorá" in Spanish) lining the seawall and used daily by local fishermen. Reed boats are thin, canoe-shaped structures that boaters ride on top of instead of sitting inside while paddling.

Another attraction is the small mercado (market in English) whose size is not representative of the cultural experience you will get pushing your way through the 'too narrow for comfort' shop-lined passageways abuzz with chatter and bartering.

Think you are being asked a bit much for that chunk of cheese or half-chicken? Flash a friendly smile and ask for your bill to be a few soles less... chances are you've made a deal!

If finishing your market trip in the early evening, stroll about 6 blocks or so south and over four to the seaside to take a walk on "El Muelle" (the pier in English) and enjoy dazzling views of the sun setting on the horizon.

The pier is a landmark of Huanchaco along with a Baroque-style church perched on a cliff overlooking the pier and bay.

Many come to this area to view the Chan Chan archeological site - ancient ruins made out of mud that are

a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Chan Chan is a short 15 minute bus ride from Huanchaco, located just 5 km (3.10 miles) to the southeast.

Another nearby attraction is the open-air modern shopping mall located just 15 minutes from downtown Huanchaco. This is where to go for International-cuisine restaurants, shops and enjoy a film in the multi-plex movie theater.

Finding a rental won't be overly difficult, and much easier to obtain when planning your arrival outside of the high-season summer months (December through March).

Low-cost hostals that can function as short-term 'hospedajes' (lodging in English) are numerous. Get yourself situated for a week or two, ask around for available apartments or houses and you should have suitable accommodation in no time.

Basic, minimally furnished apartments can be found for \$250 - \$300 USD per month. Ask at your hostel or hotel for a referral, or simply walk around and look for 'alquilar' ('to rent' in English) signs - it is a very small town.

Basic meals can be had for \$2.50 USD - look for the 'menú del dia' (meal of the day). You will have to splurge a bit more for seafood, but a large plate of fried calamari for around \$5 USD is cause to complain? I think not :)

The most important thing? Have fun and enjoy your stay, even if you decide to move to Lima instead!

Things You Will Love Living in Huanchaco

- The city of Trujillo - with all its amenities including an airport - is only 20 minutes away.
- Lovely waterfront promenade for long walks or runs.
- A steady-stream of tourists (less during winter) from all over the world to meet and interact with (speaking English!).

Things You May Not Like Living in Huanchaco

- It is a very small town (next to nil town center) with mainly traditional restaurants (yet wonderful seafood) and shopping.
- From June to September there are many cloudy days with little sunshine (and few tourists).

Cusco, Peru

If there is a city to fall in love with in Peru, it's Cusco. And it makes an excellent choice for a long-term stay as well.

What's to love about Cusco other than being the way station to Machu Picchu and having many lovely museums, restaurants and hotels? Everything. The low cost of living, markets, people, active nightlife.

There is even a sweet, little gold-painted man who stands at Plaza San Francisco waiting patiently for a sole to be dropped into his cup whereas he comes to life and gives a fortune. How endearing is that?

As if the above wasn't enough, thanks to increased police presence due to the number of tourists who travel through the area annually Cusco is a very safe city to live in - if you stay near the central area around Plaza de Armas and adjoining neighborhoods such as San Blas.

Ok, there is one thing you may not like... the odd shooting off of a gun (no, nothing official it seems and don't ask why) or round of fireworks for no apparent reason, at any time of the day or night.

"Honey... where did that come from?" "Don't know sweetie, just go back to sleep." If that won't cause you too much distress, you'll be fine living in Cusco!

Is There a Shopping Mall in Cusco?

Unfortunately (or fortunately depending on your perspective) there is no shopping mall in Cusco. The closest thing to a mall (and where you will be directed to if you ask where the 'shopping' is) is Centro Commercial El Molino.

El Molino is basically a large, 'smashed in next to each other' hodgepodge of the same type of shops you will see on the streets of Cusco; selling clothing, toys, shoes, kitchenware, etc. It is a ways out of the central area, not easily accessible by bus, you need to take a taxi (10 minutes, \$2 USD).

What is great at El Molino, surprisingly enough, is the cerviche stands at the front entrance. They don't look like much, but for 10 soles (\$3.80 USD) you will get a huge serving of fresh seafood with a large pile of fried calamari on top. Easily enough food for two. How about a sweet potato to go with it?

The best shopping in Cusco is to walk around the central plaza area (Plaza de Armas, Plaza San Francisco). This is where you will find the most selection of imported items and things marketed to folks who may have the cash to pay for them; quality camping gear, Patagonia jackets, boots, imported sandals, etc.

Where to Buy Groceries in Cusco?

There are two grocery stores in Cusco, Orion and Mega. Mega has multiple locations but the Orion store is located directly across from the main farmer's market. For where

to find fresh baguettes and a price chart of basic items, [click here](#).



"This photo was taken in the courtyard of the Inka Museum which is just two blocks off of Plaza de Armas. You can see the woman not weaving textiles who is sitting in the background covering her face... indigenous people often do not like to be photographed."

How To Find an Apartment in Cusco

There are plenty of options for rentals in Cusco. Fully-furnished 'equipped for tourists' apartments with cable T.V., kitchen supplies, etc. are available at Renacimiento – a hostel with apartments for rent.

A one-bedroom apartment is \$350 USD per month or \$40 USD per night. Renacimiento is in a great central location three blocks from Plaza San Francisco on Calle Ceniza #331. Their website with photographs is [here](#).

For the best deals, especially if you are staying for 6 months or longer, buy the small local newspaper Rueda de Negocios (50 cents). Clasificados means 'classifieds' and Alquileres means 'for rent'.

You can find places for as low as 400-700 soles (\$150-\$270 USD) per month. Some even advertise with cable T.V. and Wifi.

What You Will Love Living in Cusco

- Beautiful location to walk around in and enjoy with plenty to do.
- Fun nightlife scene with discos, reggae clubs, live bands and shows.
- Central area safe due to increased police and military presence.

What You May Not Like Living in Cusco

- If you need seclusion, this isn't really the place. Cusco is a very active 'bustling with life' city, not a small town though living in an area such as in San

Blas may make it feel like one.

- There are always tourists around, sometimes a lot of them depending on the time of year. This can be a plus as well, as it makes for a constantly changing mix of people and folks to talk with.
- Shopping options are basic, no designer clothing in Cusco... may be frustrating for those used to more westernized cultures.

Medellin, Colombia

Colombia has its share of worldly problems (crime, drugs, poverty) yet also has areas that have become mainstays on the travel circuit and become increasingly popular for extended stays or relocation to the country such as the city Medellin (population 3 million).

Those who have moved to Medellin - second largest city in Colombia after Bogotá - not only love it, they rave about it. Cited among its many virtues: safe for a metropolitan area; nightclubs and nightlife; variety of things to do and places to see; friendly locals plus many International visitors living part of full-time in the area.

Last but not least is a low cost of living. A small apartment on the outskirts of town can be found for \$400 USD, and there are many shared apartments with rooms to rent for less.

One recommended place to stay while you adjust and look for housing is International House Medellin. They have rooms with cable T.V., shared living and kitchen facilities plus a rooftop deck with sauna for \$330 USD per month (one month stay minimum).

An online service that lists apartments and rooms for rent is CompartoApto.

If you make your midday meal (noon - 2 p.m.) the primary meal of the day you can eat-out often and on the cheap. Find a local neighborhood restaurant serving a multi-course set menu which will include a bowl of soup, some

type of meat, rice, small salad and bread or fried plantains (similar to bananas but eaten cooked, not raw) for \$2.75 - \$3.50 USD.

Large grocery stores such as Carrefour (grocery chain popular in Argentina also) are plentiful in Medellin. Shop as any budget traveller or daring 'living abroad expat' would buying low-end, local products and you are all set.

You need to be aware that when arriving in Colombia and your Tourist Visa (the stamp in your passport) is for more than three months, you need to register within 16 days at an Immigration Office. For more information [click here](#).

Things To Do in Medellin

Traveling through the city to check things out and need a few things to do? To get an arial view of Medellin and its surrounds you can ride a cable car - The Metrocable - up above the city skyline and enjoy a coffee or meal.

Linea K of Metrocable spans the Santo Domingo neighborhood and is credited with virtually abolishing crime in the previously dangerous barrio as well as attracting many new businesses.

A second line - Linea J - was then created to connect other outlying barrios with a hoped for similar effect; decreased crime and more economic opportunity. In addition to the great views, you may find yourself riding one or the other to simply get from one area of the city to the next.

There is a waterpark in Medellin - Juan Pablo II Waterpark) - an aquarium at Parque de Explora and the Medellin Zoo. Bullfights are held in the La Macarena Show Center (Carerra 63 # 44A- 65) January-February.

You can learn about the city's drug lord ruled past by partaking in the Pablo Escobar Tour. You visit the house where he lived and was shot dead plus meet his brother Roberto, whom is still amongst the living.

Things You Will Love Living in Medellin

- What you would expect in a large metropolitan area with over 3 million people - many things to see and do such as museums, public parks, art galleries, large shopping complexes, sports facilities, etc.
- Cheap and efficient transportation system (buses, taxis and Metro) that make getting around easy.
- Many International visitors and expats to meet at a local pub and sit and have a beer or coffee with - speaking English!

Things You May Not Like Living in Medellin

- For all its improvements, the reality is Colombia has a high-level of people living in poverty and of drug abusers. Seeing folks crumpled up on pieces of cardboard boxes will be not be uncommon, and difficult for many to view on a daily basis.

- Air Pollution. Medellin is an industrial city and has along with it the resultant chronic in-city industrial smog and pollution.

Salto, Uruguay

The majority of locations in Uruguay would be very difficult, if not outright impossible, to live off of \$800 USD per month such as capital city Montevideo, Punta del Este, La Paloma and other Atlantic coast beach towns.



"We stored our luggage in the bus station and spent a day in Salto, getting new health certificates for the dogs and going to the waterpark and hot springs just 20 minutes out of town. In the afternoon I took a break to have a chorizo (two actually, and it wasn't hard to figure out why I packed on 10 pounds while living in Argentina...) and beer and sat with my camera ready. It was a spot where these local kids hung-out, trying to get passing drivers let them wash their windows."

Inland locations are dirt cheap, but not where most International visitors would enjoy living. Salto is an exception to both of these rules i.e. affordable and with enough attractions in and around the city to make life interesting for a while.

Located in northwestern Uruguay next to the Uruguay River, Salto is 498 km (309 miles) from Montevideo - 6 hours by bus.

It is the second largest city in Uruguay with a population over 110,000. There is a branch of the University of Uruguay with students obtaining degrees in Architecture, Law and Nursing. The main tourist attraction in Salto are the termas (hot springs in English). It is a low-key city, evident by the lack of upscale services and shopping found in other areas, yet has a small shopping mall - Salto Shopping – that is attached to the bus terminal.

Salto Shopping has a multiplex movie theater and many businesses including the One possibility for life and low-cost living in Salto would be to rent a two-bedroom house and open a small B&B or hostel and play host to the continuous stream of tourists that visit the area to enjoy the termas or simply transit through on their way to Iguazu Falls in Argentina.

You would not even need to become a resident of Uruguay to open a small business. Costs to obtain residency range from \$600 - \$1000 USD and up depending on the amount of legal assistance you need.

When your visa is about to expire, you could just cross the

Salto Grande Bridge atop the Salto Grande Dam and enter Argentina. Then turn around and re-enter Uruguay with a new 90 day visa stamped into your passport.

A small apartment or house can be found for \$300 - \$350 per month. For information on renting in Uruguay [click here](#).

Your primary expense will most likely be buying groceries; food is not cheap. A restaurant meal will run from \$6 - \$10 USD.

The best budget shopping advice is to shop around. Your corner produce stand may give you the best buy for fruit & veggies, and a regular discount if you are a regular customer, but the supermercado (supermarket in Spanish) may be the best place for dry goods such as rice, salt, sugar, packaged soup, etc. as they will have more selection and carry low-end as well as more expensive brands.

Similar to in Argentina, beer and wine drinkers get a break. A liter of beer in Uruguay is only \$2 - \$3 USD. - Budweiser is found everywhere in addition to the national brands Pilsen and Patricia. A decent bottle of wine can be bought for \$3 - \$4 USD.

What You Will Love Living in Salto

- City living with a laid-back small town atmosphere (and low costs!).

- Termas (hot springs) and beautiful outlying areas for camping and exploring.
- Local shopping mall with multiplex cinema.

What You May Not Like Living in Salto

- Blistering hot during the summer months January & February with temperatures reaching 40 degrees C (104 F) and high humidity.
- Very local feel to the city, very few foreigners living full-time in the area to interact with.

Cheap Places to Travel

If on a tight budget, the best countries to visit and be able to see tourist attractions and get to do a few popular activities offered in the area (horseback riding, trekking, museums, paragliding, surfing, etc.) are Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru. All three countries have an array of attractions including beaches, mountain highlands and ancient resting grounds of those who have been before us.

You can experience Argentina outside of pricey Patagonia and spending a ton of time in Buenos Aires, but the problem is travel from one area to the next is usually long and not always low-cost; prices have been steadily rising and don't seem to be slowing down any time soon.

The following are some of our favorite places in South America, all good choices for a low-cost stay. At the end of each write-up is a description of additional information on the website (complete travel guide to the area, detailed hiking info, etc.) and a link.

If traveling for an extended time, these are good places to hang-out for a couple of weeks to get your travel fund back in the black. And don't forget, all the locations in the Cheap Places to Live chapter are great, inexpensive travel destinations too.

You may wonder why I have not included areas in Colombia here. Two reasons: Colombia is no longer dirt-cheap - becoming comparable to the cost of travel in

Argentina - and we didn't do a lot of exploring there. Also, I had safety concerns since I was traveling as a single woman with an 11 year old American child at the time.

There are places outside of the main tourist zones that are less expensive and may be good for a long-term stay, but getting there is not going to be cheap and I am not familiar with them. If Colombia is your passion, get a Lonely Planet or Rough Guide guidebook to help plan an adventure and research online.

Quebrada de Humahuaca, Argentina

The Quebrada de Humahuaca (Humahuaca Gultch in English) is an elongated mountain valley that spans approximately 155 km (96 miles) in JuJuy province, Northwestern Argentina.

Its sides are flanked by multi-colored rock formations that scale down into the Rio Grande – a river that snakes through the center in various shapes with variable amounts of flowing water. During the summer (December through February) most of the riverbed runs dry.



“I took this shot just 10 minutes walking from the main square in Purmamarca. There is a tourist office in town that will give you a map and directions to a great lookout point just a ½ hour walk from town. This shot was taken with a simple 35 mm digital camera, yet you can still see the beautiful colors of the rock formations.”

The indigenous villages of the Quebrada de Humahuaca area are what attract tourists, in addition to the gorgeous scenery. This area is popular with South American travelers on road trips, International tourists bussing in from San Salvador de Jujuy or Salta.

The towns Purmamarca, Tilcara and Humahuaca are tourist-ready with local crafts, artwork and clothing shops, restaurants plus many hostals.

Purmamarca is the village closest town to Jujuy – only 1 1/2 hours by bus from the main bus terminal, around \$5 USD. It is most known for the spectacular hillside backdrop to the town - "Cerro de los Siete Colors" (Hill of Seven Colors in English). It's like you are plopped right down into the hills, and has paths into the desert five minutes from the main square.

Next is Tilcara, just a ½ hour from Purmamarca. This village is popular for hikes to the “Pucará de Tilcara” - reconstructed pre-Inca ruins that are a 30 minute or so trek through paths carved into the hillside. Tilcara is a 4 hour bus ride from Salta, or 2 hours direct from Jujuy.

From Tilcara is Humahuaca, with the most people (around 11,000) and highest elevation (9,800 feet/ 2987 meters) It is 3 hours by bus direct from Jujuy or five hours from Salta, Argentina. Salta is featured in the Cheap Places to Live section. From Humahuaca you can take a bus to the La Quicaca border with Bolivia.

A popular daytrip is to the tiny village of Iruya, which cannot be accessed from Jujuy directly. Travelers hike its

steep, narrow cobblestone streets and visit the “Ruinas de Titicote” (Titicote’s Ruins in English).

More Travel Information

A complete travel guide to the Quebrada de Humahuaca, including more photos and videos plus places to stay and eat in my favorite town – Purmamarca – is located [here](#).

Chaco Province, Argentina

Most travelers pass through here by default, on their way from Iguazu to Salta. However, it has a few interesting areas including a great place to chill-out for a few weeks or month at little cost: Paso de la Patria.



“This is the Teatro El Nacional (The National Theater in English) in downtown Corrientes.”

You also get to experience another side of Argentina outside of Buenos Aires, and interact with locals who are a bit different than Porteños (folks who live in BA); laid-back, friendly yet very conservative all in one fell swoop. At least that was our experience.

The mid-sized cities Resistencia (population 387,158) and Corrientes (population 339,067) are located in Chaco province in Northeastern, Argentina. Resistencia is called the "city of statues" with over 500 sculptures and is the capital of Chaco.

They are connected by a suspension bridge - General Belgrano Bridge - over the Negro River and only a 40 minute drive apart. It's hard to visit one without the other. If bussing through the area you will land in Corrientes; Resistencia has an airport terminal but no bus station.

The Chaco region is famous for its sweltering hot and humid summers and each area has summer resorts around 40 minutes from the town center.

Near Resistencia (54 km/35 miles) is Isla del Cerrito (Cerrito Island in English). Close to Corrientes is the larger resort Paso de la Patria. Private shuttle service (in minivans \$3 USD) run every two hours or so daily to the town from Plaza Cabral in Corrientes.

Paso de la Patria has year-round, full-time residents who play host to the hoardes of visitors who arrive in summer (January & February). If wanting a short-term beach visit there are 'Alquilar' signs everywhere (means 'to rent' in English) and a few low-cost restaurants.

We paid \$200 USD for a large apartment for one month, a few blocks from the beach (2011). There are stores for basic groceries, a bakery and carniceria (butcher shop). I shopped at the large, discount grocery stores in Corrientes

to save money. The main activities are boating and fishing.

There was no WiFi in the town at the time, but a couple good Internet cafes for \$1,50 USD per hour.

More Travel Information

More information plus photos of Corrientes, Resistencia and Paso de la Patria is [here](#).

Iguazu Falls, Argentina

Iguazu Falls National Park ("Parque Nacional Iguazú" in Spanish) is home of the spectacular Iguazu Falls and can be visited from either Puerto Iguazú, Argentina or Foz do Iguaçu, Brazil. For those on a budget, the Argentina side is doable, Brazil side is much more pricey.



“We took turns visiting Iguazu Falls, to each have some personal time while the other made sure Buster & Tiger (correction: Tiger) didn't bug anyone at the hostel. Blake took this shot of the upper falls; rainbows are a common site when visiting due to all the water spray, yet still magical every time.”

It is \$29 USD to enter the falls (2012) and a \$2 USD bus ride from Puerto Iguazú (30 minutes, busses leave every 15 minutes from the bus terminal) to the entrance.

The town is small and fun to walk around in, no need for expensive taxi rides. If you are a hummingbird fan, be sure to visit the small, private hummingbird garden (small fee).

On his day visiting the falls Blake even managed to get in a short boat ride, and I only gave him around \$50 USD for the day. I spent my day walking on path after path, with amazing views spoiling me in every direction; felt no loss not being whisked around in a helicopter or speed boat, though for those with more cash both are possible.

You can also visit the Brazilian side of the falls from Puerto Iguazú, and not have to pay an expensive visa fee (required when traveling in Brazil) – as long as you go there and back in the same day.

It takes around 40 minutes from the bus terminal (busses every half hour), just stay on the bus when it stops at Immigration (for tourists who are entering Brazil), same upon your return. If worried, ask the bus driver in Puerto Iguazú if you can go to the Brazil falls for the day and then return to Puerto Iguazú. My bet is he or she will say 'yes'.

More than 2000 species of plant & fauna have been identified in the park in addition to over 900 species of bird. The most commonly seen small mammal is the coati, who love to show-up at the restaurant areas during

lunch time.

In addition you may see: Brazilian otter, black howler monkey, jaguar, ocelot, black-capped capuchin, broad-nosed caiman, tiger-cat, tapir, tamandua, raccon and merganser (also called sawbill duck).

There is a nice selection of restaurants in the town, and easy to find a cheap sandwich or pile of empanadas. Better yet, visit one of the small grocery stores to buy cheese or meats to put on your fresh baguette. Or some pasta and sauce to make an inexpensive meal back in your hostel.

Residential Uno is one hostel that has \$10 USD dorm beds and a guest kitchen plus pool, just three blocks from the bus terminal.

More Travel Information

A complete travel guide to Iguazu, including photos and videos of the falls plus where to sleep and eat in the towns Puerto Iguazú (Argentina side) as well as Foz do Iguaçu (Brazil side) can be found [here](#).

Copacabana, Bolivia

If visiting the islands of Lake Titicaca in Bolivia, the small town of Copacabana is where you will most likely start your journey. You can also bus from Copacabana to Puno, Peru (2 ½ hours) and do tours to the floating islands from Puno.

If you are captivated by photographs of the colorful, bamboo-looking islands - you want to go to Puno. From Copacabana you can take boat trips to Isla del Sol and Isla del Luna, which are actual islands.



“Below is Lake Titicaca and one of the loading docks on the south side of Isla del Sol (there are 4 or so others). Up close are donkeys doing their job bringing goods up, there are no cars or roads on the island, only foot paths that you share with locals, llamas and alpacas busy at work.”

We used Copacabana as a 'replenish the travel funds' spot and it was perfect. Our month-long stay in 2011 was dirt cheap – only \$150 USD for the two of us in a private room with cable T.V. (Hostal 6 de Agosto) and I rarely spent over \$4 USD for a meal for the two of us.

This is one of the best hostals in Copacabana, and the only one at the time that had WiFi. It is located just two blocks from the waterfront on the main tourist drag – 6 de Agosto street – that is lined with shops and restaurants.

There are three markets in Copacabana located next to each other at the intersection of Pando and Jauregui streets. Comedor Santa Marta serves hot meals for under \$2 USD, Mercado 2 de Febrero next door serves breakfast (coffee, donuts with drizzled honey, bread & cheese) beginning at 7 a.m. and Mercado Modelo which has grocery items, butcher shops for fresh meat and chicken, etc.

We took separate overnight trips to Isla del Sol, me bringing Tiger along whom the local children were enthralled with and constantly asked to pet. I had to respond with, “no, es malo” ('is mean' in English) as he has a penchant for biting children; but of course.

Isla del Sol is a large island with tourist amenities on the south and north sides. It takes an hour (hydrofoil-style boats) or 1 1/2 hours to arrive on the south side, a half hour more to be dropped off on the north side.

The island is considered a sacred Inca site – in mythology is the birthplace of the sun – and has around 3500

inhabitants. There are no cars on the island, when dropped-off at the dock on the popular south side it is a 40 minute hike to reach the top via the 'Inca Staircase' with 210 steps.

The north side has no stairs and is lower cost but has few hotels or restaurants. The south side is where all the action is; don't miss sunset, the views are spectacular.

More Travel Information

A complete travel guide to Copacabana, including photos and videos and information on trips to Isla del Sol, can be found [here](#).

Tupiza, Bolivia

We plopped down in Bolivia in 2011, landing in Tupiza and stayed for a month. Yes, as usual we had to hussle for the best deal in town and sit tight until cash reserves flowed more freely but I'd do it again, even with a full pocketbook.



“Just across from the train station is a small children's park. One man makes his living setting-up these pool tables every day, and charging 50 cents or so per game. Tourists are welcome and it's a great way to interact with locals”

Tupiza is laid-back, fun and very cheap. If you like to ride horses, and don't mind the local variety (some are not well-trained, if you are an inexperienced rider, make sure

to let the tour guide know) you can take rides into various areas of the surrounding Cordillero de los Chichas, even multi-day tours with a private guide like some adventurous souls do. Fees are some of the lowest rates in South America for horseback riding.

There is a main farmer's market – Mercado Antonio Gilduran – with a food court on the upper level; opens at 7 a.m. Skip paying for a room with continental breakfast and spend half that or less sitting amongst the locals sipping strong, black coffee and munching greasy, hot, fried empanadas sprinkled with sugar.

You can take hikes to two viewpoints, one an easy 20 minutes or so from Plaza Principle to Corazon de Jesus – the statue of Jesus seen from most every corner of town and the other a more challenging 1 ½ hour hike (includes around 50 minutes of stairs up to the top) to 'La Cruz' (The Cross in English) lookout point for the amazing views.

On Thursdays and Saturdays across from the train station the outdoor market sets-up shop with Bolivianos coming into the town from surrounding areas to sell their wares.

If you walk to the far end of the town – opposite the bus terminal – from around 2 p.m. to 7 p.m. you can sit on the curb and be served a small plate of juicy fried this or that served with a potato and small salad for around 75 cents.

Taking the train from Tupiza is the best way to get to La Paz, much more comfortable than the bus; even cheap seats on the older Wara Wara train. You take the train to Oruro, then a bus direct to La Paz which is only 3 hours

from Oruro.

You can take the train direct to Uyuni from Tupiza, but many travelers choose to take a 4-day adventure from Tupiza to the Salar de Uyuni, ending in the town of Uyuni. Detailed information on trips to the Salar de Uyuni – a highlight of any trip to Bolivia, can be found [here](#).

More Travel Information

A complete travel guide to Tupiza, including photos and videos and directions to hiking locations, can be found on South America Living website [here](#).

Potosi, Bolivia

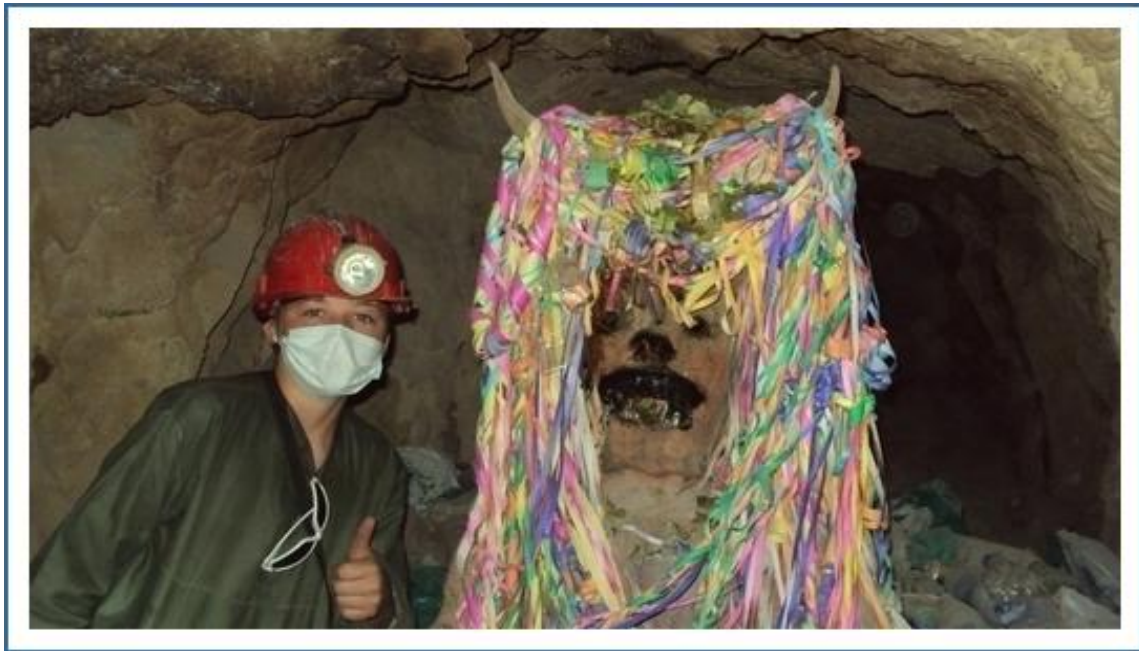
If you are looking for a workout during your South American journey, and maybe packed on a few pounds from eating one too many alfajores or empanadas while sitting 20-plus hours on your rear-end traveling cross-country... this high altitude town may be just what you and your body are looking for.

Potosi is another great walking town, only in this case you are chugging through one of the highest altitude cities in the world at 4,090 meters (13,420 feet) above sea level.

Oxygen-sapping altitude that triggers your red blood cells to multiply at lightspeed plus streets built either on a hill or on a hillside that ensures any short stroll is equal to a good 15 minutes on a stair stepper. Who needs a gym when they have the city of Potosi at their disposal?

After you have rested the first day and slept one night free of symptoms of altitude sensitivity or sickness... prepare to challenge yourself underground with a trip through the silver mines. Information on causes and treatments of altitude sickness is [here](#).

There are over 1000 cooperative mines in the outer areas of the city and many with guided tours that are led by ex-miners. The miners are hard at work during the tours, and before visiting all groups go first to the local market to pick up a few gifts (cigarettes, alcohol, coca leaves) for their kindness in allowing tour groups to tramp through their work space.



“Blake played journalist for a day and took photographs and videos during a tour to the mines in Potosi. This was shot by a fellow traveler, and is of Blake and 'Tio' – the god of the Miners whom they lavish with gifts. There are cigarettes in his mouth, and a beer can in his hand that you can't see.

When visiting, tourists also bring gifts for the miners.”

The silver mine tours last 4 hours (afternoon or morning) and some visit more than one mine – great for anyone who is concerned about being underground for too long a time. Some of the tours only visit one mine, and therefore are underground for over an hour or so.

If the city is really kicking your butt and you'd rather take a chill day, head to the hot springs at Miraflores or Tarapaya. Tarapaya has two locations, one a public pool facility the other a natural lagoon, you want to head to the Tarapaya Lagoon.

Tarapaya Lagoon is in a remote, natural setting. It is a half hour walk from the road where the bus will drop you off or better yet, take a guided tour that includes lunch as there are no restaurants.

If you go solo to the hot springs, you can take a local bus direct to the tiny town of Miraflores (40 minutes), have a cheap lunch at one of the local restaurants and bathe in the public pools at Miraflores with locals. Busses to Miraflores depart from Mercado Chuquima near the main bus terminal.

There are many fun locations to walk in the city, with the central plaza a great place to start – Plaza 10 de Noviembre. In the blocks around this area are many tour operators for you to plan a trip to the mines or Tarapaya as well as some of the fancier restaurants. There is also the Casa Nacional de Moneda museum (National Mint of Bolivia in English), just a block away.

Budget travelers will want to eat at the market, or at night, places around the market. At night the area around the main market – Mercado Central with Mercado 17 de February next door – becomes alive with food cart vendors selling hot dogs, hamburgers, etc. and fried chicken and french fries shops galore.

More Travel Information

A complete travel guide to Potosi, including more photos and videos of inside the mines and more information on Miraflores & Tarapaya Hot Springs is [here](#).

Baños, Ecuador

Simply put, Baños is a nature and adventure sports lover paradise, approximately 4 hours by bus from capital city Quito.

This is one place we regrettably did not get to visit. The travel guide on the website was researched by Jena Davison – a travel writer who lives in Quito. She also provided some awesome photographs, such as this one of sliding down a waterfall; really!



“Sliding down a waterfall in Baños.”

It is a place we would have loved, and also lived in for a month or longer, exploring the area while partaking in some of the thrill-seeking activities such as: canyoning (rappelling down waterfalls, wet suit provided), river rafting, and of course the ever-present zip lining.

There are also many natural spas in the area, offering reasonably priced massages (\$7 USD on up), facials, manicures, mud baths and detoxifying cleanses. Two recommended ones are El Refugio (a little ways out of town) and Luna Rutun.

When you see a hostel advertised for \$8 - \$9 USD per night (there are two in Baños; Hostal Erupcion and Hostal Chimenea) you can most likely make a deal to stay for a month for around \$200 USD.

It is how we managed to travel long term on a tight budget. Then find the cheapest place to buy groceries (farmer's market if there is one), cook your own meals (fun in and of itself, especially when shared with other travelers) and you are all set.

The two caveats are to pay the total cost upfront, and avoid arriving during high season in the area; beach towns December to March, ski towns July to August and anywhere during Carnival, Christmas or New Years.

More Travel Information

A complete travel guide to Baños with where to stay and eat plus photos of adventure activities such as sliding down a waterfall... is [here](#).

Montañita, Ecuador



“Yes, he is really playing the guitar behind his back, and plays with his mouth as well, without missing a beat; unbelievable but true. This is a musician from Peru, who was being filmed during this show I caught at the Bier House of Rock n Roll. The Bier House (pronounced 'Beer House') is a great place to hang-out in the evening in Montañita.”

You will have a hard time finding any travel article on Montañita without the phrase 'party capital' of Southern Ecuador somehow woven in. If you visit without reading anything beforehand, you will come to the same conclusion.

Montañita is a town made by partyers (current status, used to be a small fishing village) and for those who like to

party. Hippies from Argentina and Peru who travel the continent on the cheap, making and selling jewelry on the streets as they go make up a large segment of the Montañita population at any given time. International tourists and Ecuadorians from Guayaquil looking for an all-night drinking fest make up the the rest.

The towns rasta culture is fun to observe, regardless of how much you care to participate. And there are many decent restaurants with big screen T.V.s, great for hanging out in the afternoon or evening with a cold drink, watching the crowds pass by.

Surfing is the other main activity, and there are many shops that give lessons, rent equipment and take beginners out on trips in the surrounding area such as nearby Olon; the break in Montañita can be challenging, is used for surf competitions.

This stretch of Southern Ecuador on the Pacific coast – just three hours by bus from Guayaquil – is excellent for exploration and full of interesting activities that can be done for little cash.

You can take a local bus to nearby Puerto Lopez (1 hour, \$2.50 USD) to take a boat tour to the “Poor Man's Galapagos” – Isla de la Plata – or visit lovely Playa Los Frailes. Many other towns are in-between, look out the window, see what looks appealing, hop-off and then wander around.

That's what I did during our month-long stay and got to see line fishermen in action at Manglaralto, swam with a

green sea turtle off the shore of Salinas and searched for sand dollars on many beautiful beaches with no tourists in site such as at Ayampe.

More Travel Information

A complete travel guide to Montañita with where to stay, eat and things to do plus inexpensive, long-term housing options is [here](#).

Colca Canyon, Peru

Friends in Uruguay raved about the Colca Canyon in Peru and said it shouldn't be missed... not only for the beauty and hiking, but because it is so cheap. Both are true. If you travel independently you can have a fabulous couple of weeks for under \$500 USD; a rarity anywhere these days, including in South America.



“A day in the life of a local in the small town of Yanque. We stayed here for a month, paid \$130 USD for a small, sparsely furnished house, and became good friends with the lovely family who runs a cafe in town - Restaurant Willari. We ate there almost daily; gotta love fried chicken, as that is what is served for dinner most days! The set lunch is \$3 USD and they have french press coffee; a treat in South America.”

If you take a private tour from Arequipa it will still be a good time but much more expensive. The main issue with traveling this area independently, is that there is so little information in guidebooks and on the Web.

On South America Living website is a complete guide to the Colca Canyon with individual travel guides to each of the three main towns; Chivay, Yanque and Cabanaconde.

You'll find out where to stay and eat for cheap plus things to do. There are directions to the local hiking spots in Cabanaconde (easy hikes) that you won't find anywhere else as well as realistic time frames for many popular overnight trips.

Don't ask why, maybe it is a Latin thing, but tourist after tourist (us included) were given incorrect times for many journeys – with one couple from Norway running out of water during a journey to remote Lake Mucara, that took 4 hours longer than expected.

On guided tours this will not happen, of course, and there are many wonderful local guides, but folks on a tight budget do not have the money for tours, and need to plan well plus have up-to-date, accurate information.

Our online travel guide covers transportation from Arequipa to the Colca Canyon as well as how to get from one town to the next after you arrive, such as from Chivay (first town you land in from Arequipa) to Cabanaconde, where treks deep into the canyon begin.

More Travel Information

Too much information to include in this eBook, to plan a trip to the Colca Canyon scroll through this guide, which includes complete travel guides to the three main tourist towns Chivay, Yanque and Cabanaconde plus many photos and videos. The guide is [here](#).

Mancora, Peru

Many folks now travel the surf & party trail, visiting Mancora in Peru and then Montañita in Ecuador or vice versa; a very easy, low-cost trip. From Guayaquil (three hours from Montañita) there is direct service to Mancora, around 18 hours, \$20 USD or less depending on the bus.



“Getting a temporary tatoo on the beach in Mancora, Peru. The other main activities are drinking and surfing.”

Not too surprising as both towns specialize in the same thing; showing tourists a good time while maintaining a strong surfing culture. If you like sunshine, warm water most of the year plus lovely beaches with cheap eats for sale and cold beer, it's a toss-up which location you'll

prefer!

And just like Montañita, Mancora has nearby areas to explore that are more tranquil and even lower cost such as Los Organos (15 minutes by bus or taxi) and Cabo Blanco, an hour away. Cabo Blanco is a hot spot for surfers in the know, with some of the best breaks on the coast.

If you stay for a couple of weeks or longer and make a deal at the start of your stay your housing costs will be a third less than the daily rate.

Staying in an area rather than passing through for a night or two is more fun in addition to being more relaxing, as you get to interact on a daily basis with locals who love seeing a familiar face and will learn your name and make friends with you in no time.

One thing Mancora has that is unique are 'one stop, full-service party, sleep, eat and have an amazing time' hostals. Loki and The Point are both legendary party spots in Mancora; Loki is located in town, The Point a short ways out of town (\$1 USD in tuk tuk).

August to September is an excellent time to visit this area as it is when Humpback whales migrate from Antarctica to the warmer Pacific coastal waters to give birth and nurse their young. You can see these magnificent creatures from the shores of Mancora, no expensive tour required.

This is Peru, so giving the national liquor pisco a try is mandatory. Refreshing pisco-laden drinks include: Pisco

Sour (pisco, lemon juice and sugar), Chilcano de Pisco (pisco, lemon juice and ginger ale) and Perú Libre (pisco and coke).

More Travel Information

More travel information on Mancora will be on South America Living website soon.

Paracas & Huacachina, Peru

Guidebooks don't extoll the riches of visiting Paracas enough, while singing the praises of sand dune haven Huacachina to the point of overkill. Both are excellent places to have an inexpensive visit, Paracas great for a really cheap extended stay.



“This is fishermen pulling in a net at Lagunilla Harbor in the Paracas National Reserve, the pelicans were going crazy!. On tours, you stop at the harbor for a lovely lunch, and there is a small cove to swim if it's a hot day.”

We spent a month (Christmas/ New Years 2012) in the tiny town of Paracas for only \$700 USD; \$250 for a comfy room at the Paracas Backpackers House and the rest for

food & activities; including trips to Huacachina, Islas Ballestas and the Paracas National Reserve.

A private minivan tour of the reserve costs around \$25 USD and is worth every penny. The tour lasts three hours and includes a visit to the museum (photos and interactive exhibits of the history and wildlife of the area) as well as a stop at the Cathedral Rock viewpoint.

Cheap eats are easy to find in Paracas, and the town of Pisco is just 20 minute bus or taxi ride away with discount grocery stores; where I shopped weekly and then cooked at the hostel.

Huacachina has a more built-up tourist infrastructure with more nightlife – next to nil going on after 9 p.m. in Paracas other than a pizza joint playing loud music and Internet cafe that serves hard alcohol. By midnight the only ones out on the dirt roads are stray dogs.

The coolest thing about Huacachina, as everyone knows, is strapping yourself into a motorized sand-crushing vehicle i.e. dune buggy with 4-6 other tourists and be taken on a 'death-defying' ride up and over a seemingly never-ending expanse of grey, hilly-mounds of sand.

For a little more cash, you get to strap on a sandboard and ride either like you are snowboarding (or face-first lying down as they made us do) those hilly mounds of sand; definitely an experience not to miss.

The best thing about this area is these towns are easy to get from one to the other. From Paracas to Huacachina

you take a local bus or taxi the 20 minutes to Pisco. From Pisco take a local bus or taxi another 15 minutes out to the highway. You then bus to Ica, only 1 hour. From Ica you can take a tuk tuk to Huacachina (5 minutes). Reverse the trip to get from Huacachina to Paracas.

More Travel Information

A complete travel guide to Paracas with cheap places to stay and eat plus photos and videos of trips to Paracas National Park and the Ballestas Islands, is [here](#). A complete guide to Huacachina is [here](#).

Cabo Polonio, Uruguay

Uruguay is the second smallest country in South America after Suriname and a pricey destination in general, partly due to the fact you have to pass through Argentina or Brazil to get there or fly. One fun, off-the-beaten-path low-cost spot is Cabo Polonio; not to be missed if traveling the Atlantic coast.



“This is a shot of a kiteboarder in Cabo Polonio traversing back and forth and back again in the bay fronting the shore... and to me sitting with my feet in the sand eating my plate of yummy seafood plus a cerveza watching, a bit of a show-off :)”

The Atlantic coast is cheap to visit if you go in the off-

season, then it is half the cost and could be considered more of a budget destination. Yet in winter it isn't much fun with most tourist-oriented businesses closed and the weather very cold and windy.

One summer spot that could be worth a week stay and at little cost is Cabo Polonio, a giant sand dune of a town (not really, but seems that way...) that functions as a tiny, hippy enclave. You can only get there via dune buggy or on horseback – how fun is that?

The main entrance is just off the main highway (where the bus drops you off, 3 hours from Montevideo), and there are jeeps at the ready to truck in loads of passengers.

The town sits on a peninsula and is fronted by a moon-shaped bay with sandy beach. Situated just outside of the main area is a lighthouse set above the rocky shore with paths through the wild brush leading to a sea lion colony below; one of the main attractions for visitors.

Wild is the key concept here; there is no electricity (at night restaurants are lit by candlelight) and next to nil development (mainly rustic wood-planked structures) – prices are reasonable and arranging an extended stay easy and low-cost.

If you want a place to unwind, meditate, listen the ocean and walk for hours undisturbed, this may be the South American retreat for you.

More Travel Information

More travel information on Cabo Polonio, including photos and videos of the 4X4 truck transport and of the sea lion colony, can be found [here](#).

Budget Travel Tips

The majority of countries in South America are no longer Third World travel destinations with Third World prices. Many areas of Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Venezuela - the Galapagos Islands in Ecuador - have become as expensive to travel in as areas in the U.S., Canada, Australia and elsewhere.

So what's a budget-oriented traveler who wants to visit the continent do to have an affordable trip? Plan well and follow these budget travel tips. We lived on the continent for over 4 years, and traveled extensively in every country except Brazil and Venezuela.

Top budget travel tip? Pick the most expensive places you will be traveling to (or transiting through) and figure out how to not let them gouge your travel funds. Rio de Janeiro, Buenos Aires, Santiago, Machu Picchu... these are all pricey locations but can be done without breaking the bank IF you are prepared beforehand.

How To Save Costs on Transportation

You thought I was going to say "take the bus instead of fly" from one destination to the next, and then roll your eyes with that 'as if I didn't already know that' expression on your face; weren't you? Well, you're right and then not so right.

Taking the bus is how most budget travelers are going to hop from one town or country to the next in South America and in most cases is the cheapest form of transportation - though not the most comfortable way to travel and often very time-consuming.



"When traveling by bus in rural Bolivia, Ecuador or Peru, often times there is no actual bus terminal, just a roadside designated area for drivers to drop-off and pick-up passengers. This is one such stop in Atoche, Bolivia - on our way from Potosi to Uyuni. Locals in the area make a living by providing snacks and drinks... sometimes cheap eats like salchipapas; sliced, fried hot dogs with french fries in a paper cone."

In Argentina and Brazil you can easily log over 50 hours on busses and still only have seen a small part of the country.

Ecuador and Peru, however, are much smaller and travel times shorter, so bus travel is very cost-efficient, and cheap. Expect to pay around \$1-\$1.50 USD per hour of travel. In Bolivia it is \$1 USD per hour.

For example, in Ecuador you can cross from one end of the country to the other (Quito to Guayaquil) in 8 hours, for only \$10 USD. In Argentina, Brazil or Chile, expect to pay 5 times that amount, minimum.

Train Routes To Save You Time and Money

In Bolivia it depends where you want to go, and in some cases taking the train a much better option, such as from Tupiza to La Paz. On this route there are no first class busses (they will sell you a ticket for one but I promise you won't be impressed) and never ending back-breaking bumpy, dirt roads.

The cost of the Wara Wara train (have to go to Oruro then bus three hours to La Paz) is the same but the trip much more enjoyable. Even in the cheapest Wara Wara train cars you have heating, comfortable seats, movies and a full-service restaurant car at your disposal for the duration of the 16 hour journey.

Another budget train route is from Buenos Aires to Mar del Plata on the Atlantic coast. When you take the cheap Diario train that runs daily it is around half the cost of taking the bus and an hour or so less (6 hours instead of 7).

Again, you have a full-service restaurant car to sit in and

have a meal or drink while enjoying the view. For more information on this train route including pricing [click here](#).

Is It Always Expensive To Fly in South America?

Airfare, due to lack of competition and not enough customers, is outrageously expensive in South America. Yet, believe it or not, there are situations where taking the plane can not only save you money, but also add an extra day to your itinerary for you to enjoy.

Want to visit Iguassu Falls (Brazil) after a stay in Montevideo, Uruguay? Get online and check airfares before you shell out \$40 USD for the Boquebus, \$12 USD for a bed in a dorm in Buenos Aires, \$15 in food and drinks then another \$130 USD or more to sit on your rear-end for 19 hours.

Puna airline can get you there in two hours, for less cost. Heading to Buenos Aires after visiting Punta del Este? Puna can get you there in an hour for only \$25 USD, if you fly on a Wednesday.

Colombia has low-cost, in-country flights that can save you much time and cost similar to what you would spend on a first-class bus. Prices change depending on the season and special deals can be available so it is always a smart budget move to get online, try to find a cheap flight before you head to the bus terminal to purchase your ticket.

Three airlines with domestic flights are: Aviana, LAN

Colombia (formerly Aires) and Satena.

Busses are priciest in Brazil and the journeys are long. When you can, fly. Rather than a grueling two-day \$300 USD or more (most likely more as you would want to break it up and stay a night somewhere) from Buenos Aires to Rio de Janeiro, you can fly with Puna for only \$200 USD, and not have to deal with hassles of crossing the border by land.

For long legs of your trip, always jump online and do a search for airfare, you may be pleasantly surprised with what you find.

How To Save Costs on Food

If you are on a tight budget and stomach rumbling, it won't take you long to discover the glory of a 'menú del día' or set-lunch meal. The cheapest meal in South America, it's rock bottom cheap at the food courts of local markets, where the locals eat lunch, sometimes under \$2.50 USD.

For under four dollars (\$2 - \$3 USD in Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru) you will be served a soup (large bowl that could easily be a meal in and of itself in many cases), main course that normally consists of a choice of beef, chicken or fish that has been fried or smothered with sauce, rice, french fries and small salad plus a drink; often times a small dessert is included.



"Can't count how many meals like this we've had... and with a cold drink and outdoor seating a pleasant way to pass a couple of hours in the afternoon. I spent a day in Salinas, Ecuador taking photos and after a swim sat for a bit at this restaurant while they began firing up the grill for the evening crowd."

In Argentina it will cost more, around \$7 USD, yet be much higher quality, more like a regular restaurant meal. The cheapest eats in Argentina are empanadas (fried or baked pastries filled with meat, cheese, vegetables), chorizo (grilled sausage with bun) and hamburgers or slice of pizza.

Another excellent cheap eat in Argentina are sandwiches at the local bakery (located everywhere!). Similar to what would be served at a cocktail party back home; bread with

the crust removed, sliced diagonally and a light coat of mayonnaise inside plus filling.

In Colombia when ordering the menú del día forget about the french fries and expect to enjoy fried plantains (similar to bananas) instead. When the portions are hearty, you rarely want more than a light-meal or snack in the evening and when skimpy, you still got fed a healthy, filling meal for next-to-nothing.

An even better - and cheaper - way to get a meal? Head to the local farmer's market if there is one in the city or town. Not only fun and a great photo opportunity, it will have the largest selection of 'local fare' - what folks eat in the area who don't have a lot of cash... like you.

Besides full, three-course meals similar to the menú del día there are stalls with 50 cent sandwiches (bread, cheese, some form of meat), 'licuados' (milk, ice, fruit smoothie), plates of fried this or that for under \$2 USD (usually fish or chicken), empanadas etc.

When you head to the market be sure to walk around and explore its outer perimeter, a street or two away. The whole area is usually full of low-cost restaurants, pizzerias and sidewalk stand set-ups. At nighttime when the market is closed (normally they close by 5 p.m.) this is often the best place in town to get your cheap eats fix.

Any other area frequented by tourists in the evening usually has an assortment of hamburger, grilled sausage on a stick, fried chicken with rice or 'salchipapas' (fried, sliced hot dog with french fries served in a paper cone) carts that start heating up the coals after 7 p.m. and are

open until midnight or so.

How To Save Costs on Housing

Arriving in a major city or tourist town with no game plan in mind is the most expensive – and riskiest – way to travel. At minimum, check our online travel guides for an inexpensive hostel or hotel and make a reservation in advance.

This insures that not only do you have a place to sleep (a must during high season times), but also that the establishment is open. It is no secret that guidebook listings are notoriously out-of-date, sending backpackers knocking on doors at locations that have been out of business for months or often times years.

I know, I have been one of those backpackers on many occasions. Our online guides are not only up-to-date, they have links to the website of the business so you can make a reservation or contact them via email. This gives you the piece of mind knowing that they are open for your patronage as well as current pricing of rooms. To view the list of travel guides [click here](#).

Next tip? When you make a reservation ask how much a taxi to the hostel or hotel is from the bus terminal or airport, wherever you will be arriving from. Or ask for bus directions. Then check one or two other options and compare prices. A cheap hostel that is a \$10 USD cab ride out of the main area is not cheap.

You do not need to do this for small towns – where you can easily walk around to find low-cost digs – just major cities and larger areas. The only exception is during holidays (Christmas, New Years, Carnival) and high season.

Holidays and high season (beach towns summer, winter at ski resorts, carnival everywhere) ALL locations should be reserved in advance to ensure you don't have to get back on that bus to the next town as there are no beds available!

Dorm beds in a hostel are normally the cheapest sleep option, and outside of high-season you often have a room to yourself. Costs can be as low as \$4 USD per person - Bolivia & Ecuador - to \$10-\$15 USD per person per night (Argentina, Chile, Venezuela, Brazil and Colombia).

If you travel with a partner, you can often share a double room with private bath at the same cost, or just a few dollars per night extra.

You can haggle the best rates when arranging an extended stay. It is always cheaper to make a deal when you first arrive somewhere and plan to stay more than two nights, than to hand-over a credit card or chunk of cash and try to negotiate later.

Many hostals will give excellent weekly or monthly rates for extended stays, if you pay the full cost up-front. In addition, they almost always give you a private room.

So if you are planning on staying in an area a week or

longer, shop around for the best rate by offering to pay the full amount upfront. In South America this is referred to as 'incontado' (in full in English) and can land you discounts up to 30% or more off the regular rate.

Settling in an area for awhile and refraining from hostel hopping is the best way to save cash. Constantly moving around is the priciest way to travel and will work through your savings quicker than you can say "buenos dias".

Know that term well as you will be saying it often! In addition to good morning, buenos dias is how you say a casual hello. South Americans are friendly in general and like tourists.

It is common courtesy throughout the continent to notice (as opposed to the North American tradition of ignoring) others who you pass in the street, in the hall of your hotel, etc. and extend this casual greeting.

Make sure there is a guest kitchen and cook a few meals. Breakfast is often included in the rate but if you ask to not have breakfast and get a discount (\$2-\$3 USD off your night stay), you can grab a coffee and pastry or bread and cheese or the local market, bakery or street stall for half of that.

Cheaper than a hostel, but impossible to arrange in advance, is staying with local families. Any time you can, jump at the chance. There is no better way to meet folks other than other tourists, experience the culture of a country outside of what is marketed to tourists while at the same time making a valuable contribution to the local economy.

You can also become a 'couch surfer' and stay a night with a local for free. You can search for available locations (large cities have many, less populated areas few or none) and reserve rooms in advance online at: www.Couchsurfing.org.

Money & Currency

Try to use up all the local currency you have before crossing the border into the next country. Only exceptions to this rule are if you have overstayed your visa and have to pay a fee, or have to pay a fee to enter the country, called a 'reciprocity fee'. More information on reciprocity fees including what you have to pay where is [here](#).

When we left Copacabana, Bolivia for Peru a week past our allotted 30 day stay they would not accept U.S. dollars at Immigration. We had to borrow from the bus driver (got very lucky) and pay him back when we landed at the bus station in Puno.

As well, know the exchange rate of the new currency before you cross the border, so are not ripped-off by money changers or spending \$30 USD on a hotel after you arrive thinking the price is just \$15 USD since you are still calculating the 5-1 exchange (Bolivia) instead of the new 3-1 exchange (Peru).

When on a tight budget these mishaps eat into the fun fund really quickly. To convert your local currency with

real-time rates use this Currency Calculator online [here](#).

Crossing Borders & Visa Fees

Know if you will have to pay a Visa fee at the border, and have the cash on-hand in U.S. dollars. You don't want to be forced to turn back and take a private taxi to wherever there happens to be an ATM... in some locations that could be an hour or more of driving!



When we arrived in the small town of Humahuaca, Argentina, this character got a huge kick out of the fact we traveled with dogs. While Tiger growled at him, I took an opportunity to grab a few photos; he took an opportunity to display his modeling talent :)"

The U.S. Dollar is the commonly accepted currency in South America. Do not bring any other types of cash (euros, Canadian dollars, etc.) unless you plan to exchange at a bank or cambio (money exchange house). Some ATMs will ask if you want your money in the local currency or issued in dollars. In Ecuador, the U.S. Dollar is the currency used.

Travelers checks can be exchanged in some areas but not all. Much better is to rely on a bank debit card or credit card and use ATMs to get funds, which also give you the best exchange rate.

How To Find A Cheap Flight

The following are some basic tips for getting the best airfare prices on your next trip to South America. Flying during high season is going to be the costliest fares across the board: avoid flying on holidays and especially during Carnival - end of February to beginning of March.

Book your flight to South America a month in advance if possible. Booking two weeks ahead of your departure time may offer a decent price break but more often than not scheduling your flight a month or more in advance can add more savings (as long as you are avoiding peak travel periods, of course).

Book departure and arrival days midweek, instead of on a Friday, Saturday or Sunday. Afterwards, play with the

dates to make sure you are getting the best deal i.e. first find the price for a Wednesday departure and arrival, then enter in a Monday date, Friday date, etc to do a quick comparison.

Use an online service that will send you email notification if the fare goes up or down. One option is fare alerts by Airfarewatchdog.com. This is a great way to have someone else be doing the work for you while you spend your time planning your trip!

Use online search comparison tools such as Kayak, Cheapflights or Expedia but also check the airlines website directly, where prices are often similar but service much better if you end up having to change your date of departure or return or other mishap.

Enroll in frequent flyer program, then use the services that will add miles to your card (affiliate programs) and pay for them with your card. Sign-up for the companies newsletter (all major airlines have one) so you are notified when they have a special deal coming up.

Travel Insurance

Lastly, before traveling the continent purchase basic travel insurance coverage for the duration of your journey. But, you scream, health care is so cheap and travel insurance so expensive... why on earth would any budget traveler even consider it when planning a trip to South America?

Ok, you are correct and like most travelers will have no serious incident requiring hospitalization or emergency evacuation during your journey, I'm even knocking on wood right now.

Yet if you are one of the unfortunate few who do end up on a bus that crashes into a hillside or get robbed and stabbed with a knife... wouldn't it be best if you had someone else paying what could add-up to thousands of dollars in medical bills?

If you break an arm chances are most likely it could be set properly at little cost in a local hospital or clinic. But if you have a more serious health emergency, you will most likely rack-up a hefty hospital bill, except in a few areas such as public hospitals in Ecuador where care is sub-standard, but dirt cheap.

What if you need to be evacuated from a remote location to a medical facility or back home? Do you travel with \$30-60k in your back pocket?

One month of coverage through World Nomads is rarely over \$100 USD, and includes basic theft coverage if you have your personal possessions stolen or lost. If you want to extend your policy while abroad you can easily purchase additional weeks or months online.

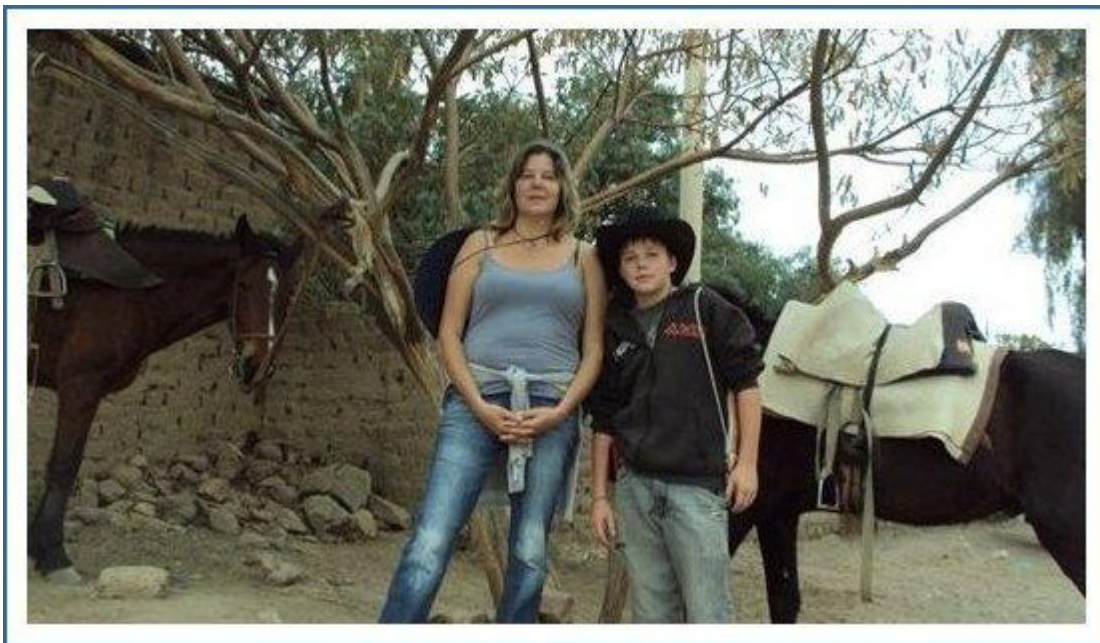
If you are a single parent World Nomads is not a great choice as they have a 'one size fits all' family rate. A better option is Assist-Card. Also, Assist-Card does not require you to pay out of pocket, then get reimbursed at a

later date, World Nomads does.

Conclusion

How Difficult Will it Be?

You've read this eBook, now you are all set for your South American journey. Seriously, I actually believe that :) It won't be paradise every day, and mishaps will occur; expect to be overcharged often, have items stolen if you are not diligently cautious, etc.



“Mom's Day adventure in Tupiza, Bolivia. I lasted for about three hours, one of them relaxing amongst the cacti, two riding. The Cordillero de los Chichas was so peaceful and beautiful, love the desert. Blake became friends with the local guides and went out on many trips plus helped take other tourists out on rides.”

But that doesn't mean it isn't a worthwhile venture. We had many frustrating times, but I knew difficult times and bad things can happen anywhere.

When I started dreaming of life beyond the borders of Mexico, Argentina seemed like the best fit. No, I'd never been there or knew anyone... it was information I'd gleaned from online research that pushed us in that direction. And it turned out to be a great choice for us.

After a year in Argentina we moved to Uruguay for more adventure and a different lifestyle – plus I wanted to become a destination expert in the country in order to get new travel writing gigs.

That didn't turn out so well. I had started the process of becoming a resident (much easier than in Argentina which was a big part of the decision to move there), and had planned on living in the country for an extended time but instead of processing our new visas ended-up leaving to protect our safety; you never know what your experience will be when challenging the unknown by moving abroad.

We went back into travel mode and got to see much more of the continent – visiting Iguazu Falls, Argentina; Colca Canyon, Peru; Isla del Sol, Bolivia; Montanita, Ecuador all the while gathering a ton more content for the website and new travel guides.

For a final hurrah, we took a trip to the Galapagos Islands that included three days on a luxury boat – The M/V Santa Cruz – and 17 days of exploration. I have a set of articles on The Galapagos Islands published on South America

Living.com with many more to come, including the best ways to travel the islands on a budget.

How Much Will it Cost Per Day?

I've already shared our monthly income we lived off of from 2008 until we returned to the United States in May, 2012; \$1,600 USD which is around \$53 USD per day. That was for housing, food and entertainment for two; one adult, one child plus dog food.

It was a princely sum when we first landed on the continent in 2008, a more meager amount by the time we repatriated back to the U.S. I'm happy with a good book or enjoying a beer while watching the world go by, and thank goodness as it was all the fun I could afford many days. I took lots of bike rides as well, and beach towns were great for swimming. Just being in a foreign country is fun, and if you like to take photographs – a source of endless inspiration.

I made additional income off and on during our time living in South America as a freelance writer, which went towards educational and sports opportunities for Blake. As time progressed and the cost of living inched-up, that extra income started to go towards basic living costs; everywhere on the continent prices are rising, especially for tourists.

A doable monthly amount to travel the continent in 2013 would be around \$35 USD for one adult; for a hostel, bus

transport and food. Add-in additional costs to do the fun stuff such as surfing lessons, visiting Iguazu Falls, the Colca Canyon, nice meals out etc.

If you take much of the advice in this eBook and hang-out a week or longer in the cheap locations described here, that amount will spread much further. You can double your travel time and half the cost if you travel slowly; jumping from one location to the next is the most expensive way to travel.

And travel during Christmas time, hoping family will gift you cash, instead of presents... that is what allowed us to visit the Galapagos Islands before our reluctant return.

How To Contact The Author

Thank you for buying this eBook. I hope you found it useful and enjoyable to read. If you have comments or questions, feel free to email me. You can also leave a comment on the website or via our Facebook page.

Email: editor@southamericaliving.com

Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/southamericaliving>

With the information here and on the website plus free advice offered from this author, you can't go wrong. Stay safe, stay smart and have fun.

Please do not share this PDF file with others, additional copies can be purchased on the South America Living

website [here](#).

Sincerely, Molly McHugh

P.S. Blake sends his regards as well.

P.S.S. “Woof!” That's from Buster & Tiger.

The End

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