



## ESSENCE OF LATIN AMERICA 19N/20D

### TOUR SUMMARY

Embark on an unforgettable 20-day cultural odyssey across Latin America, where ancient civilizations, living traditions, and vibrant cities await. Begin in **Mexico**, tracing the legacy of the Aztecs and Zapotecs through the bustling heart of **Mexico City** and the artisan villages of **Oaxaca**. Journey next to **Guatemala**, where colonial splendour in **Antigua**, the sacred beauty of **Lake Atitlán**, and the enduring spirit of the Maya come alive through weaving cooperatives and colourful highland villages.

Cross continents to **Peru**, where the majestic **Andes** welcome you to the sacred city of **Cusco** and the timeless mysteries of **Machu Picchu**. Delve into Inca engineering, Quechua traditions, and highland cuisine before flying to **Brazil**, a land of rhythm and resilience. Explore **Rio de Janeiro's** iconic landmarks—from Christ the Redeemer to Copacabana Beach—and dive into the soul of **Salvador**, the Afro-Brazilian capital of music, spirituality, and Carnival.

Your journey concludes in **Argentina**, where European elegance meets Latin passion in **Buenos Aires**. Walk through historic neighbourhoods, experience the allure of tango, and venture into the pampas for a day with the legendary **Gauchos**—Argentina's cowboy poets. This immersive adventure through five countries reveals the heart of Latin America through its UNESCO sites, traditional crafts, local flavours, and unforgettable people.

**Best time:** Mid-May to Early June

**Note:** While every effort has been made to ensure accuracy, this itinerary is intended as a guide and may include unintentional errors or be subject to adjustments due to unforeseen circumstances.



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### ***Detailed Itinerary***

#### **DAY 1: Welcome to Mexico City – Historic Centre Exploration & Cultural Evening**

Arrive in the vibrant heart of **Mexico City**, where ancient Aztec heritage blends seamlessly with colonial elegance. Your cultural adventure begins with a guided tour of the **Zócalo**, Mexico City's grand historic plaza. Admire the majestic **Metropolitan Cathedral** and explore the fascinating **Templo Mayor ruins**, offering a glimpse into the city's pre-Hispanic roots.

As dusk settles, experience the soul of Mexico through a **traditional dinner accompanied by live Mariachi music** at the lively **Plaza Garibaldi**, a beloved gathering place for music and folklore.

Dinner & Overnight at hotel in Mexico City.



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## **DAY 2: Teotihuacan Pyramids & Basilica of Guadalupe – Mexico's Sacred Past**

After breakfast, journey northeast to the awe-inspiring **Teotihuacan Archaeological Zone**, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Walk along the **Avenue of the Dead**, and climb the legendary **Pyramid of the Sun** and **Pyramid of the Moon**, where ancient civilizations once gathered to observe the cosmos and honour their gods.

In the afternoon, return to the city for a spiritual visit to the **Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe**, one of the most important pilgrimage sites in the Americas. Learn about the Virgin's enduring significance in Mexican culture and admire the blend of colonial and modern religious architecture.

Dinner & Overnight at hotel in Mexico City.



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### **DAY 3: From Mexico City to Oaxaca – Colonial Charm & Local Flavours**

After breakfast, check out and enjoy a scenic journey to **Oaxaca**, a city renowned for its vibrant culture, colonial architecture, and rich indigenous traditions. Upon arrival, settle into your hotel and take in the city's laid-back yet colourful ambiance.

In the late afternoon, enjoy a **leisurely orientation walk** through **Oaxaca's historic centre**, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Stroll past elegant colonial buildings, artisan boutiques, and the lively **Zócalo**, framed by arcades and street musicians. You'll also visit the beautifully restored **Santo Domingo Church**, a masterpiece of baroque architecture.

In the evening, savour **Oaxacan regional cuisine**, famous for its complex moles, fresh corn tortillas, and smoky mezcal.

Dinner & Overnight at hotel in Oaxaca



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#### **DAY 4: Monte Albán Ruins & Oaxaca's Artisan Villages – Ancient Civilizations & Living Traditions**

After breakfast, set out for a half-day excursion to the magnificent **Monte Albán**, one of the oldest and most important **Zapotec archaeological sites** in Mesoamerica. Perched on a mountaintop with panoramic views of the Oaxaca Valley, this UNESCO-listed site reveals temples, pyramids, and ceremonial platforms that date back over 2,000 years.

In the afternoon, dive into **Oaxaca's vibrant folk art culture** with visits to nearby artisan villages. Explore **San Bartolo Coyotepec**, famous for its black pottery; **San Martín Tilcajete**, known for colourful alebrijes (wooden fantasy creatures); and **Teotitlán del Valle**, where Zapotec weavers craft intricate rugs using natural dyes.

Return to Oaxaca in the evening and enjoy another taste of its world-famous gastronomy, perhaps paired with a glass of local mezcal.

Dinner & Overnight at hotel in Oaxaca



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### DAY 5: Zapotec Heritage – Weaving Traditions, Mole & Mezcal | Fly to Guatemala

This morning, journey into the **Zapotec heartland** with a visit to **Teotitlán del Valle**, a village famed for its rich weaving traditions. Witness a live demonstration of the **backstrap loom**, an ancient technique still used by indigenous artisans to craft vibrant woollen textiles with natural dyes derived from cochineal, indigo, and marigold.

Delight your senses with a **tasting of Oaxaca's culinary treasures**, including smoky **mezcal** and rich, hand-ground **mole sauces**, prepared using time-honoured family recipes.

In the evening, transfer to the airport for your **short flight to Guatemala City**, gateway to the Maya world and colonial highlands.

Dinner on your own (depending on flight time) and Overnight at hotel in Guatemala City.



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## **DAY 6: Colonial Antigua – Baroque Architecture, Jade & Chocolate Traditions (UNESCO)**

After breakfast, depart for the enchanting city of **Antigua Guatemala**, a UNESCO World Heritage Site nestled between volcanoes and filled with colonial splendour. Begin with a **guided walking tour** through cobbled streets lined with pastel-hued buildings, historic **churches**, and grand **convents** that echo the Spanish Baroque era.

Discover Guatemala's ancient gemstone heritage with a visit to a **jade museum and workshop**, where you'll learn about the sacred role of jade in Maya culture and see skilled artisans at work.

Later, indulge your sweet side at the interactive **ChocoMuseo**, where you'll take part in a **hands-on chocolate-making workshop**—from bean to bar—using traditional techniques and local cacao.

Dinner & Overnight at hotel in Antigua Guatemala



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## DAY 7: Lake Atitlán – Boat Tour & Living Mayan Traditions

After breakfast, journey to the highlands to explore **Lake Atitlán**, one of the most breathtaking lakes in the world, surrounded by volcanic peaks and traditional Mayan villages.

Board a boat for a full-day cultural excursion across the lake, stopping first at **San Juan La Laguna**, known for its vibrant art scene and **women-run weaving cooperatives**. Witness a **Mayan backstrap loom demonstration** and learn how natural dyes and sacred patterns tell stories passed down through generations.

Continue to **Santiago Atitlán**, a village steeped in indigenous Tz'utujil traditions. Visit local markets, meet artisans, and hear the story of **Maximón**, a folk saint revered in these parts.

Dinner & Overnight at hotel on Lake Atitlán



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### **DAY 8: From the Highlands to the Andes – Fly to Cusco, Peru (via Lima)**

After breakfast, bid farewell to the Guatemalan highlands and transfer back to **Guatemala City** for your international flight to **Cusco, Peru**, with a connection in **Lima**.

Prepare to trade colonial plazas and volcanic lakes for the **Inca heartland** of the Andes. Upon arrival in Cusco—once the capital of the Inca Empire—you'll be welcomed by crisp mountain air, colourful textiles, and a deep sense of history woven into every cobblestone.

Dinner and Overnight at hotel in Cusco



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**DAY 9: Cusco – Inca Fortresses, Colonial Cathedrals & Andean Culture (UNESCO)**

Begin your day exploring **Cusco**, a UNESCO World Heritage City blending majestic Inca ruins with colonial charm. Visit the imposing **Sacsayhuamán fortress**, renowned for its massive stonework and panoramic views over the city.

Stroll through the historic centre to the **Cusco Cathedral**, a masterpiece of colonial architecture housing priceless religious art. Then, discover the **Qorikancha (Temple of the Sun)**, once the richest temple in the Inca Empire, where gold once glittered atop its walls.

In the afternoon, immerse yourself in local culture at the **Andean Textile Museum**, learning about traditional weaving techniques and vibrant patterns symbolic of indigenous identity. Conclude with a soothing **coca tea experience**, an ancient ritual believed to aid acclimatization to the high altitude.

Dinner & Overnight at hotel in Cusco



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## **DAY 10: Day excursion to Sacred Valley – Ancient Markets, Inca Fortresses & Quechua Weaving Traditions**

Today, venture into the breathtaking **Sacred Valley of the Incas**, a landscape rich in history, culture, and natural beauty. Begin at the bustling **Pisac Market**, where vibrant textiles, handicrafts, and traditional goods fill colourful stalls. Then, explore the nearby **Pisac ruins**, an impressive Inca archaeological site perched above the valley, offering panoramic views and intricate terraces.

Continue to **Ollantaytambo**, a remarkable Inca fortress and town that served as a strategic stronghold during the Spanish conquest. Wander through its well-preserved streets and climb the terraces for a glimpse into Inca engineering genius.

In the afternoon, participate in a **weaving workshop with Quechua artisans**, learning ancient techniques that have been passed down through generations. Experience firsthand the symbolism woven into every thread and the vibrant colours derived from natural dyes. Return to Cusco

Dinner & Overnight at hotel in Cusco



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**DAY 11: Machu Picchu – Journey to the Lost City of the Incas (UNESCO World Heritage & New Seven Wonder)**

Embark on a breathtaking **scenic train journey** through the Andean mountains, following the winding Urubamba River toward the legendary **Machu Picchu**, one of the world's most iconic archaeological sites and a UNESCO World Heritage wonder.

Upon arrival, enjoy a **guided tour of the ancient citadel**, exploring its mystical terraces, temples, and plazas while learning about the Inca civilization's architectural mastery and spiritual heritage.

After your visit, return by train to Cusco for your overnight stay.

Dinner & Overnight at Cusco



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**DAY 12: Cusco Free Day – Explore, Create & Immerse in Local Artistry**

Enjoy a leisurely day to soak in the charm of **Cusco** at your own pace. Choose from a variety of enriching optional activities designed to deepen your cultural experience. Take part in a **hands-on Peruvian cooking class**, mastering traditional dishes like ceviche or alpaca stew.

Alternatively, join a **pottery workshop** led by local artisans, where you'll learn ancient techniques to shape and decorate your own clay masterpiece.

For those who love to wander, explore the vibrant **San Blas artisan quarter**, renowned for its cobblestone streets, galleries, and boutiques showcasing handcrafted textiles, jewelry, and woodwork.

This flexible day allows you to personalize your journey in the heart of the Andes.

Dinner & Overnight at hotel in Cusco



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### **DAY 13: Fly to Rio de Janeiro – From Inca Peaks to Brazilian Beaches**

After breakfast, transfer to Cusco Airport for your international flight to **Rio de Janeiro, Brazil**, one of South America's most iconic and vibrant cities.

Upon arrival in **Rio de Janeiro**, known for its stunning beaches, samba rhythms, and towering peaks, you'll be transferred to your hotel. Take the evening to relax or enjoy a sunset stroll along **Copacabana or Ipanema Beach**, soaking in the laid-back energy of Brazil's cultural capital.

Dinner on your own and Overnight at hotel in Rio de Janeiro



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## **DAY 14: Rio de Janeiro – Icons, Beaches & Brazilian Rhythm (UNESCO)**

Start your day exploring the spectacular cityscape of **Rio de Janeiro**, a UNESCO World Heritage Site for its unique blend of natural beauty and urban culture. Begin with a visit to the awe-inspiring **Christ the Redeemer**, one of the **New Seven Wonders of the World**, perched atop **Corcovado Mountain** with panoramic views over Guanabara Bay.

Next, ride the cable car up **Sugarloaf Mountain**, where you'll take in sweeping vistas of Rio's coastline, city skyline, and rainforest-covered hills.

In the afternoon, unwind on the world-famous shores of **Copacabana and Ipanema beaches**, where sun, surf, and street vendors create an atmosphere of joyful energy.

As night falls, immerse yourself in Brazil's rich cultural heartbeat with an optional **Samba show or Capoeira performance**, celebrating Afro-Brazilian heritage through music, dance, and martial arts.

Dinner & Overnight at hotel in Rio de Janeiro



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**DAY 15: Salvador da Bahia – Afro-Brazilian Spirit & Colonial Grandeur (UNESCO)**

This morning, take a flight to **Salvador**, the cultural soul of Brazil and the heart of Afro-Brazilian heritage. Upon arrival, explore the vibrant **Pelourinho Historic District**, a **UNESCO World Heritage Site** famed for its cobblestone streets, pastel-hued colonial architecture, and rhythmic street life.

Dive deeper into Salvador's spiritual and cultural roots with a visit to a **Candomblé cultural centre** or an **Afro-Brazilian drumming school**. Learn how this fusion of African, Indigenous, and Portuguese traditions has shaped music, religion, and resistance in Brazil.

Optional: Sample local Bahian cuisine such as moqueca or acarajé, known for its bold flavours and African influence.

Dinner & Overnight at hotel in Salvador



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## **DAY 16: Salvador – Baroque Churches, Carnival Culture & Bahian Flavours**

Enjoy your final full day in Salvador with a curated blend of history, creativity, and culinary tradition. Begin with a visit to **Salvador's baroque churches**, including the breathtaking **São Francisco Church**, known for its gold-gilded interior and elaborate tilework.

Continue to the **Afro-Brazilian Museum**, where exhibits trace the cultural and spiritual influence of Africa in Bahia through sacred objects, ritual art, and historical narratives.

In the afternoon, dive into Salvador's festive soul with a **Carnival mask-painting workshop or Afro-Brazilian percussion class**, discovering the rhythms and artistry behind the city's iconic celebrations.

Wrap up the day with a **Bahian cooking demonstration**, where you'll watch the preparation of the traditional seafood stew, **moqueca**, and savour a tasting infused with local flavours and storytelling.

Overnight at hotel in Salvador



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## **DAY 17: Fly to Buenos Aires – Tango, Elegance & Latin Soul**

Today, transfer to the airport for your international flight to **Buenos Aires, Argentina**, often called the "Paris of South America" for its grand boulevards, Belle Époque architecture, and thriving arts scene.

Upon arrival, settle into your hotel and take the evening to unwind or stroll through the chic neighbourhoods of **Palermo or Recoleta**, known for their leafy parks, boutique shops, and lively cafés.

Optional: Enjoy your first taste of Argentine cuisine with a traditional **asado (barbecue)** or explore the city's famous café culture with a stop at a historic coffeehouse.

Overnight at hotel in Buenos Aires



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## **DAY 18: Buenos Aires – Historic Neighbourhoods & Tango Under the Stars**

Discover the many faces of **Buenos Aires** on a full-day cultural tour through its most iconic neighbourhoods. Begin in **Recoleta**, home to elegant Parisian-style architecture and the famed **Recoleta Cemetery**, final resting place of Eva Perón.

Continue to the vibrant district of **La Boca**, where bold murals and **street art** bring the colourful Caminito alley to life with stories of immigration, football, and tango. Then, explore **San Telmo**, one of the city's oldest quarters, filled with antique markets, cobblestone streets, and bohemian charm.

In the evening, immerse yourself in Argentina's most passionate art form at a **live tango show**, accompanied by a classic **Argentine dinner**. For those feeling adventurous, take part in an **optional tango dance lesson** and learn a few sultry steps from local pros.

Dinner & Overnight at hotel in Buenos Aires



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## **DAY 19: Gaucho Day – Argentine Ranch Life, Asado & Folklore**

Step out of the city and into the vast pampas for a full-day **Gaucha experience** at a traditional **estancia (ranch)** just outside Buenos Aires.

Upon arrival, be welcomed with warm hospitality and a **mate tea tasting**, a cherished Argentine ritual. Then, saddle up for a leisurely **horseback ride** or ride in a traditional carriage through the countryside, soaking in the tranquil rural landscapes.

Enjoy a hearty **asado BBQ lunch**, grilled over open flames and served with local wines—Argentina's most beloved culinary tradition. The afternoon features **folkloric music and dance performances**, showcasing regional styles, and a chance to see **Gaucha horse-riding demonstrations** full of skill and flair.

This immersive day offers a deep connection to **Argentina's rural heritage and cowboy culture**.

Overnight at hotel in Buenos Aires



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## ESSENCE OF LATIN AMERICA 19N/20D

### **DAY 20: Departure – Farewell Buenos Aires**

On your final morning in **Buenos Aires**, enjoy a relaxed start or take advantage of some last-minute time in the city with an optional visit to one of **Palermo's artisan markets**, perfect for picking up handcrafted souvenirs, local leather goods, or vibrant Argentine textiles.

Depending on your flight time, your private transfer will take you to the **Buenos Aires International Airport** for your onward journey.

Your unforgettable **20-day cultural odyssey through Latin America**—from ancient ruins and sacred valleys to samba beats and tango nights—comes to a close, leaving you with rich memories, artistic keepsakes, and stories to last a lifetime.

**TOUR ENDS**



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