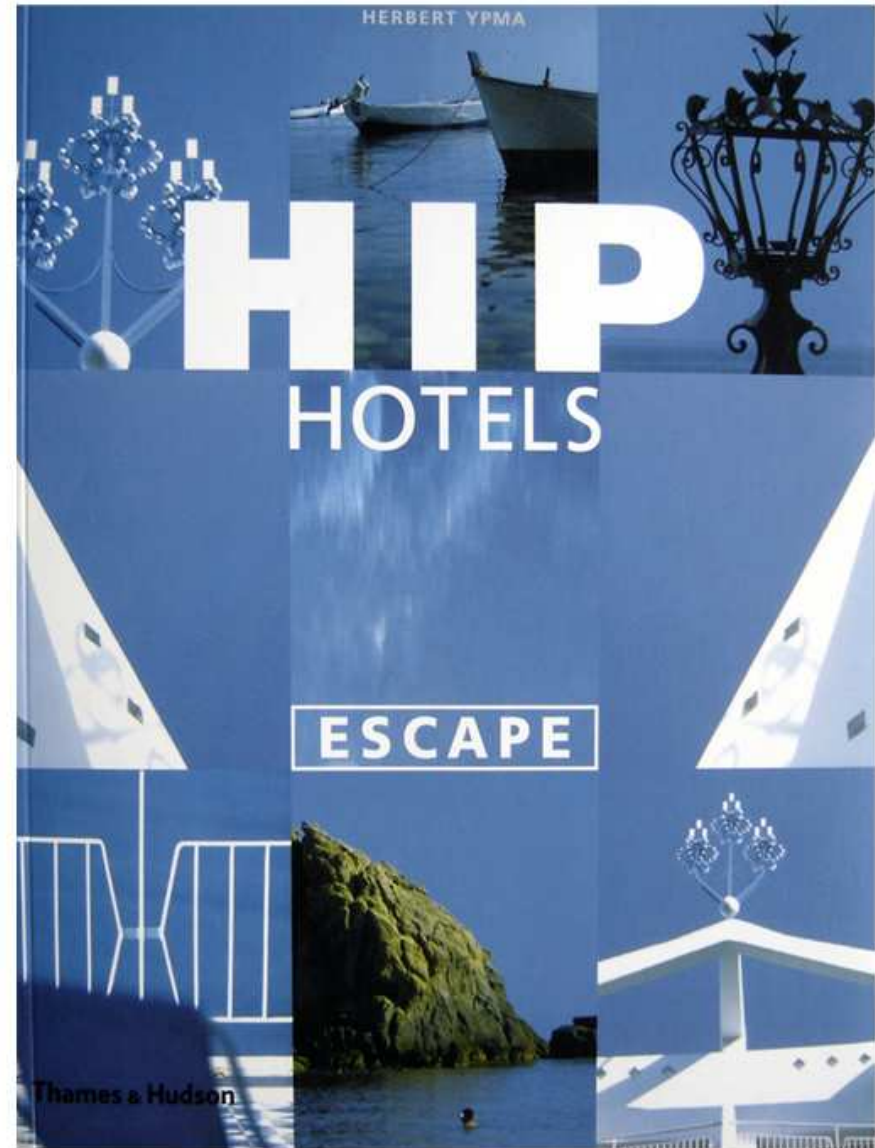


HIP HOTELS ESCAPE  
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## hotel explora

'The joy of the remote' is Explora's motto. Its founding purpose is to allow you to experience territories previously accessible only to the most serious trekkers and climbers. Explora is in the virgin wilderness of Chile's Patagonia, a labyrinth of fjords, glaciers, icebergs, turquoise lakes and jagged peaks, in a land populated by nanas, penguins and llamas. The hotel perches spectacularly above a waterfall on the Rio Paine, in the 600-square-mile Torres del Paine National Park, so named because in the local Indian language *paine* is the word for glacier-blue. It lives up to its motto in very convincing fashion. To get here you fly from Santiago, Chile's cosmopolitan capital, to Punta Arenas on the Strait of Magellan, the southernmost city in the world. Short of Antarctica, Patagonia is about as far from civilization as you can get.

Its remoteness was the inspiration behind Bruce Chatwin's classic work *In Patagonia*. As he explains: 'The Cold War woke in me a passion for geography.... In the late forties the Cannibal of the Kremlin shadowed our lives ... and yet we hoped to survive the blast. We started an emigration committee and made plans to settle in some far corner of the earth. The war would come in the northern

hemisphere so we looked to the southern. We ruled out Australia and New Zealand and fixed on Patagonia as the safest place on earth ... somewhere to live when the rest of the world blew up....'

Samarkand, Timbuktu, Patagonia ... there are few locations so untouched by the rapid rise of global travel that they can still conjure dreams of legend and adventure. It's even rarer for these places to live up to one's dreams. This is one that does. Seeing the Hotel Explora for the first time, singular and isolated, looking for all the world like a tycoon's yacht run aground, you cannot help but wonder how it got here. Designed to withstand Patagonia's ferocious winds, Explora is the project of Pedro Ibanez, a Chilean multi-millionaire who believes passionately that urbanites should experience the wonders of nature - starting with his own backyard, Chile's 'outhack'.

The first step towards building this modern and luxurious thirty-room lodge in pristine wilderness was to win a National Forest Service competition. The Chilean authorities are particularly protective of their extraordinary natural set piece. Ibanez not only won the competition, he also drew up a comprehensive manifesto for his new hospitality organization.



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Explora's dramatic setting, as viewed through a bathroom window



Only llamas are equipped to deal with Patagonia's soaring, bleak, isolated peaks



Explora is perched beside the Rio Paine in the middle of six hundred square miles of national park



Created by Chilean entrepreneur Pedro Ramirez, Explora exists to encourage excursions into Chile's wilderness



The warmth and intimacy of the interior compensates for the 'outdoors in all weather' policy during the day



The architecture of Patagonia's Explora is one of extreme contrast - of pristine modernity versus untamed nature



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Firmly opposed to mass tourism, Explora's approach is one that the American media has taken to calling 'eco-luxe'. It embraces not only a profound respect for the natural environment but also a supportive empathy for the local people and culture. In practice that means every detail is carefully planned to minimize the impact on the environment, from the size of excursion groups (no more than eight people) to the need for the architecture to complement the local landscape and culture.

All this may sound perfectly logical, even self-evident, but in a place as remote as Patagonia there are no second chances: one cannot simply go down the road to another establishment. From the moment your plane touches down in Punta Arenas you're in their hands. The hotel is therefore a crucial part of the equation. It's difficult to think of anything Hotel Explora might have left out. All thirty rooms have spectacular views, the enclosed lap pool situated alongside the running river is heated to tropical temperatures, food is flown

in from Santiago, there are saunas for post-excursion recovery and intimate lounging spaces with cowhide-covered easy chairs beside large open fires – ideal for drinking their 'Pisco Sours' (hey, I climbed the Valle del Frances glacier – I deserved it!).

Every day, regardless of the weather, there are five different options from a wide range of excursions the hotel has developed, all rated according to difficulty. Undertaken in the company of highly experienced guides, they include climbing, trekking, glacier hiking, mountain biking, riding, kayaking and bird watching. Explora emphasizes that it is not a 'sport hotel' and does not want to drive guests into adrenalin-fuelled, competitive nature experiences. But on the other hand you will not be allowed to use the weather as an excuse to stay indoors. In the Explora philosophy, a snowstorm can be just as enjoyable as a sunny day. They are right – even if some of us need a gentle push before we will get out there and discover it for ourselves.

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postal address Gochile, Suecia 84, suite 82, Santiago, Chile  
telephone (56) 2 251 2625 fax (56) 2 251 5882  
room rates from US\$1347 (for a minimum three-night stay)

