

Course Description

Patagonia Year

Features Of This Course:

- The longest course at NOLS! 67 days in fall, 68 days in spring, and 135 overall
- Eight sections: hiking, service project, Wilderness First Responder (WFR), glacier mountaineering, sea kayaking, cultural immersion, rock climbing, and independent student group travel (ISGT).
- Minimum age: 18
- Group size: 17 students and 3-4 instructors per section
- Spanish language immersion on cultural section
- Certifications: Wilderness First Responder and Leave No Trace Master Educator
- Opportunities for experiential education in: camping skills, technical mountaineering, Patagonian culture, leadership training, communication, risk management, natural history and expedition planning

Course Progression

This extended expedition packs in outdoor skills and international culture to create one of NOLS' most unique adventures. From mountain travel on seldom-climbed peaks, to sea kayaking along Patagonia fjords, and rock climbing at the foot of the Andes, this is an unparalleled immersion in Patagonia. The course has a strong focus on leadership, expedition behavior and cultural interaction. You'll spend an entire section living and working with local *poblador* families in a remote rural setting. Along with a strong grasp of Patagonian culture, you'll also see more of this region's remote and breathtaking scenery than most visitors. And the course offers two certifications for students interested in outdoor careers around the world, Leave No Trace Master Educator certification, and the Wilderness First Responder (WFR). At the end of the course, you'll go home talking about how there's no place more beautiful on earth, telling the story of how a sea lion followed your boat along coastal fjords, describing the amazing food you ate at a campo, and proudly boasting that a group of peers can come together in remote Patagonia to form a team.

This exciting year is split into two semesters. The fall semester consists of hiking, a short service project, Wilderness First Responder (WFR), and glacier mountaineering. The hiking section will provide a solid foundation of basic camping skills and team building, as well as an introduction to Leave No Trace principles. The service project is a chance for you to contribute a little to the place you are traveling and living in. Having had some field experience, you will spend the 10-day WFR course on the NOLS campo, refining your wilderness first-aid skills. From there, you will expand on your glacier mountaineering skills, to round up your first semester. The semester will finish with a traditional Chilean barbeque, or *asado*. A short holiday break will follow, with opportunities to travel, return home, study Spanish or participate in local community service projects.

The expedition will reunite back at the NOLS *campo* in January ready to begin the second half of the year in Patagonia. Your second semester will have four sections: sea kayaking, cultural immersion, rock climbing, and independent student-group travel. The order of the first three sections may vary. The sea kayak section will be a chance to explore the islands and fjords of coastal Chile. This past year we established a new climbing site in inland Chile, where you will get to learn the technical skills of climbing. The Patagonian culture is unique to this region, which is what you'll discover on your own, as you live with a Chilean *poblador* family for the cultural immersion part of the course. This extended NOLS expedition will culminate with the special opportunity to put all of your expeditioning skills into practice as you plan a 7-10 day student- led expedition. Again, the schedule of the second semester will vary slightly if there are two groups. Each group will do the same activities but in a different order and sometimes in a different location to maintain the exploratory nature of our routes for both instructors and students. Both groups will conclude the course with the 7-10 day student- led expedition.

Patagonia

Welcome to the mythical land of fire and ice. Here you'll explore a landscape far off the beaten track of most world travelers—a landscape of ice-capped peaks, volcanoes, temperate rain forests, tundra, pampas, coastal fjords, and vast glaciers. Patagonia is not a country but the remote southern regions of both Chile and Argentina. This area is located as far south as British Columbia is north and is closer to Antarctica than it is to Santiago, the capital of Chile. The Patagonia region is sparsely populated and is an ideal location for a remote wilderness experience.



The Expedition

NOLS courses in Patagonia are exploratory in nature. It is probable that your route is as unfamiliar to your instructors as it is to you. You'll likely find that there are no trails or that the area is not mapped. You may be turned back by unexpected situations or impassable terrain. You may sit for days waiting for a river to go down, or the weather to subside, so you can move. You'll come to understand that living and traveling in a remote land can be at once fulfilling and challenging. The unknowns can be frustrating, and the work hard but there are ample rewards. You'll be exploring a raw, remote and beautiful wilderness that few, if any, have seen before. You'll learn about different ways of life—both the Chilean culture and the expedition culture—and in the process, learn a lot about yourself and your native culture.

There are other challenges as well. For some, it might be keeping a smile on their face while bushwhacking through bamboo in the rain. For others, the group dynamic may be the most difficult aspect of the course. Living and sharing yourself in a small group of people for 135 days can be more demanding than the hardest day with a pack on your back. This is why the group depends on the strengths of all the individual members. There is a saying that “the group is only as strong as its weakest member,” yet it can also be stronger than the sum of its parts.

A NOLS course is both academic and experiential in its approach to learning. A combination of formal classes, interactive learning, and experiential education is used to teach the skills necessary for outdoor travel and expedition living. Leadership will be taught by example and experience. As the Patagonian year progresses, students take on greater responsibility for managing the expedition. Once a good base of leadership, decision-making and communication skills has been developed, you will practice leading your peers during daily travel days and facilitating risk management decisions within your group. A consistent attitude of mutual support, sharing, flexibility and learning are encouraged and promoted. The skills you learn will vary depending on the particular route, weather conditions and the evolution of the expedition team of which you'll be an integral part. After experiencing expedition-style travel in Patagonia, you'll be prepared to live and travel in a wide variety of conditions—environmental and societal.

Semester Sections:

1) Hiking

- Introduction to basic camping skills, navigation, and route finding in the mountains
- Introduction to leadership, expedition behavior and communication skills
- Introduction to Leave No Trace principles

In order to have a successful year, it is essential to build a foundation of both technical and social skills. This first section of approximately 17 days is set up for this, and gives students a chance to focus on getting the basics down so they can expand to more advanced skills in the following sections.

2) Service Project

Given the amount of time that the Patagonia Year spends down in Patagonia, the service project is a chance for you to contribute a little to the well-being of the zone through outside work. It is a short experience of approximately 4 days, yet nonetheless valuable.

3) Wilderness First Responder

- 80-hour course taught by staff of the Wilderness Medicine Institute of NOLS (WMI). Upon successful completion of practical and written exams, you'll receive a two-year WMI of NOLS WFR certification.
- The WFR is a required first aid certification for most outdoor programs, camps, schools, and NOLS Instructor Courses.

This is the standard course for outdoor professionals and provides you with the tools to make critical medical care and evacuation decisions in remote locations. The busy course days will run from 9:00 am to 6:00 pm. Two evening sessions will be scheduled. You'll spend half of your time completing practical skills, case studies and scenarios designed to challenge your decision-making abilities. Scenarios and practice sessions will take place both inside and outside. Attendance is required for all scheduled classes. During your WFR, you'll camp on our 450-acre farm, known as *Campo Las Vertientes*, “The Springs,” with spectacular views of the Rio Simpson Valley.



4) Glacier Mountaineering

- Glacier travel
- Potential opportunities for ice climbing, peak ascents, snow climbing, and crampon use

This four-week exploratory mountaineering section travels in a remote mountain region in the Patagonia Andes. Here you'll spend weeks surrounded by steep mountains, snow, ice, expansive rivers and dense coastal forests. This will be your classroom to learn alpine and big-glacier mountaineering techniques. This section will offer you the challenges of unknown terrain and fierce alpine weather and give you the skills to travel to any mountain area in the world.

The region's remoteness and challenging weather keep many mountaineers away. As a result, many of the glaciers and peaks are rarely traveled or remain unclimbed. However, exploration does not come without its price; few people have even been to our course areas. There are no established routes to follow, no guidebooks to read, and no predictable weather patterns to plan around. Given this inherent uncertainty, you must approach the expedition with a flexible attitude.

On this section, we will build on your wilderness travel skills and introduce glacier mountaineering techniques. Skills such as rope handling, basic knots, belaying, ice axe use, rope team movement, and glacier travel will be taught and practiced. You'll learn to choose routes through glaciated terrain, avoiding crevasses and other mountain hazards. You will camp on snow-covered glaciers, learning the skills to find "safe zones" and camp comfortably in this new environment. Later on the course, more advanced skills such as crampon use, snow and ice protection placement, climbing techniques for snow and ice, and crevasse rescue will also be practiced according to route considerations and weather conditions.

Weather in the Patagonia Andes can be harsh - it is a reality of this environment. Courses have encountered storms that required them to camp in snow caves for several days. Your instructors will work with you to give you the tools and training to live as comfortably as possible in the conditions you encounter.

Holiday Break

This break is designed to give you an opportunity to travel in Chile or other South American countries, study Spanish or participate in a local community service project, or to return home for the holidays.

NOLS will offer a list of options, but each student will be responsible for arranging the details of their travel, logistics and costs. **There will be no time to organize holiday travel during the course.** We highly recommend that you keep the logistics of your holiday break simple. Please remember that while we try to end the course on the dates specified safety is our first priority. This means that if it is not safe for students to travel due to severe weather or other factors we will delay the end of the course until it is safe. Please allow a day or two in your travel plans for this eventuality.

5) Sea Kayaking

- 4 weeks paddling along the southern Patagonian coast
- Potential opportunities for practicing coastal navigation, paddle strokes and self-rescue

The coast of southern Patagonia has a series of island chains that provide amazing sea kayaking. Since before recorded time, people have used these waterways to move along the coast, but while they make perfect travel corridors when the weather is calm, the weather is often stormy. The Patagonian coast has the second highest rainfall in the world and its position between the Andes and the infamous latitudes named the Roaring Forties make its weather capricious and unpredictable. When conditions are favorable for paddling, nothing can be more serene than gliding along a flat calm sea at daybreak or floating quietly listening to a pod of dolphins blowing in the distance. But when conditions are unfavorable, you may find yourself holding down your tent in a battering wind, or watching the waves break on the shore while you wait for calmer seas. You'll soon find that learning when not to paddle is as important as learning how to paddle.

The kayak section sometimes starts on one of the big rivers that pour out of the Andes. You may have to portage or carry your kayaks to avoid harder rapids. At these times, the group works together to move the boats and equipment to where paddling can be continued. Once on the sea, learning to read the weather, the ocean, the landscape, and the group's strengths are keys to sea travel. Classes include micro route finding, weather interpretation, boat handling, and tidal theory.



6) Cultural Immersion

- Up to 10 days living with a Patagonian family in a remote *campo* setting
- Opportunity for Spanish language and Patagonian cultural immersion

This rare opportunity gives you a chance to practice your Spanish language and wilderness living skills while meeting, living and learning from true Patagonians. Either individually or in small groups, no larger than three, you'll spend this section working and living on a *campo*. Your day will depend on whatever is happening at the *campo*. You might be tending to baby lambs, checking on livestock, planting new seeds in the garden or fixing a hole in the barn. Your days will be as unpredictable and varied as the Patagonian weather.

During the cultural section students will be fully immersed in the language, customs, and culture of Patagonian host families and will not be accompanied by a NOLS staff member. Prior to the cultural section we will orient students to *poblador* culture and way of life, including the daily custom of drinking the herbal tea known as *yerba mate*. In traditional *mate* use the cup is often shared among close friends and family - using the same straw, or *bombilla*. Though there may be health risks associated with sharing the same straw, this custom is a sign of total acceptance and friendship. Students may also learn the popular card game known as *truco* to help bridge the cultural and communication gaps.

Typical foods on a *campo* include bread, tea, beef, lamb, mutton, jams, potatoes, and staples of pasta, rice, or beans. NOLS will provide the host families with a stipend in order to supplement their pantry with enough food for their guests. Please bear in mind that the concept of vegetarianism is not a part of the *poblador* custom. **If you have food allergies or sensitivities, we will need to know so that we can help you communicate this to your host family and make special arrangements.**

On this section the students will be divided into smaller groups of 1 to 3 and escorted to their host families to live and breathe Patagonia homesteader culture and lifestyle for up to 10 days. Group size will depend upon a variety of factors ranging from the individual student's comfort level to what the host family can support. Students will be responsible for helping their host family with the day-to-day chores of subsistence living in a remote wilderness setting. Chores might include, but are not limited to: food preparation, gardening, plowing farmland, harvesting crops, basic carpentry, chopping firewood, fetching water, hand washing laundry, shearing sheep, branding and castrating livestock, caring for livestock, milking cows, making cheese, animal slaughter, riding horses, making fires, tending the stove, clearing pasture, working with oxen, repairing fences, herding livestock, mending clothing, trail work, and using knives and machetes. Part of the culture of *poblador* families can be a division of tasks along gender lines, and this might be expected of students as well. This means that all students may not be able to participate in all activities.

During the cultural section your instructors will not be with you. Please remember that these homes are remote and do not have telephones, cell phones, television or Internet access. You will be up to 24 hours from an emergency communication device such as a satellite phone or HF radio. This level of remoteness and immersion is unique and affords a genuine experience. However you must keep in mind the implications of illness and injury in this setting. All students will be expected to use their knowledge and judgment to take extra care to avoid injury to self and others during the entire semester, and particularly during the cultural section

This is the chance of a lifetime to experience and learn about a way of living that comes from a different era. *Campo* living is a true part of the Patagonia experience. Here you'll meet and learn from people who are passionate about the Patagonian wilderness and have a vast knowledge of the birds, animals, weather, trees and plants found in Chile.

Spending time in another culture requires a significant amount of patience and an open mind. By the end of your cultural section you will have gained an experience that can serve you in many ways later in life. You will have also made an incredible connection to another culture and lifestyle. Our hope is that this experience is as rewarding for the *pobladores* as it is for you.

7) Rock Climbing

- Base camp set-up to maximize rock climbing practice and skills development
- Potential opportunities to top-rope, lead climb, multi-pitch climb, and boulder

Climbing camps are base camps. You'll set-up your tents, establish a kitchen and stay in one or several locations for the duration of the section. You may camp in established campgrounds or in more pristine areas. Regardless, you should expect to encounter other people on this section and may end up using vehicles to travel to climbing areas.



Instruction will progress from the basics of movement, knots, rope handling and belaying to more advanced topics such as protection placement, rappelling, and rope system management. More advanced topics such as ascending a fixed-rope, aid climbing and rescue techniques may be addressed. If you are ready, there will be opportunities to lead climb. NOLS has well-established criteria to assess and evaluate a student's readiness and ability before allowing them to lead climb.

Climbing may be done as a large group when top-roping or in smaller groups of three to four when attempting multi-pitch routes. You'll be able to progress at your own pace. Our instructors emphasize a safe, positive attitude toward climbing and the development of your own natural abilities.

Like any outdoor pursuit in Patagonia, rock climbing is weather dependent. We schedule the climbing section to take advantage of the best time of year for favorable weather, but we cannot guarantee the weather. You should come prepared to climb but recognize that the opportunity to spend as much time as possible on the rock is weather dependent.

8) Independent Student Group Travel (ISGT)

- Opportunity for practical application of Expedition Planning skills
- Opportunity to apply curriculum studied throughout the year on your own expedition

Regardless of the order of the previous sections, the ISGT is the final section of the Patagonia Year. After months of studying, living, and traveling, you'll put into practice everything that you've learned about expeditioning. This is a 7-10 day section that you'll plan with 4-6 other students and the guidance of your instructors. A day is spent talking about your group goals, planning the route, arranging pickup and drop off locations, preparing your equipment, organizing your rations & fuel, and discussing emergency plans. This time is a highlight for our students: it's a time to discover how much they've learned, and a time to reflect on the past and the future. Whether this last section includes an instructor in the group or not depends on the competence and skill level attained by individuals and the group as a whole.

Each Independent Student Group will carry a satellite telephone for emergency use or for a necessary change in their route due to unforeseen circumstances. Given the limitations of the phone and travel times, students may still be up to 24 hours from outside help. The student groups will be aware of other groups traveling in close proximity that would be able to offer help in case of emergency. Our students often say the student expedition was the best part of their course.

The final section will end back at the NOLS *campo* where you will spend two days wrapping up your year-long adventure in Patagonia. On the morning of the last day of "small groups", you will get picked up and brought back to the *campo* to de-issue and clean the gear that you used in the field, and you'll get a chance to reflect on the whole year-long experience. The following day the Patagonia Year will culminate with a graduation ceremony and traditional Chilean BBQ, or *asado*, and you'll get dropped off in Coyhaique that afternoon.

Weather and Other Challenges

The weather in Patagonia is a mixture of wind, rain, snow and sun. Be ready for just about any type of weather condition. For a country no more than 120 miles wide, the variety of climates is astounding. On your course you could end up living camped on a windy glacier in whiteout conditions or cooking in a heavy downpour. But, at times, you might find yourself traveling in the hot sun longing for the next stream. The wind can howl, the snow can pile high, the rain can come in sheets and sometimes for days at a time. Expect rain and cold regardless of what other weather conditions you may encounter. One of the greatest rewards to living in the Patagonian weather is the opportunity to visit, travel and experience a magical place that few other people ever see. One of the most important skills that you'll develop on your Patagonia Year will be the ability to live comfortably in varied weather conditions. The weather challenges we describe here are not meant to intimidate you, but they are the reality of living in the Patagonian backcountry.

"It may be said that it suits the majestic temple of savage and virgin nature to hide from the eyes of the profane its treasures of beauty behind a thick curtain of wind and storm-tossed clouds. At rare times, it shakes off the clouds and then it is as if a magic curtain parts and there appears, resplendent in the light, ice sphinxes and spires and pinnacles bordered by a fire lace of snow, and alters with precious stones beneath a cobalt sky."
Alberto Maria de Agostini- Italian mountaineer, explorer, and geographer



Another challenge of Patagonia courses is the exploratory nature and learning to live with the unknown of what you might find around the next corner. Though exciting at times, this can also be frustrating. The unknown provides a unique challenge to your NOLS Patagonia experience that can be difficult to articulate. A former NOLS Patagonia student described her experience this way: *“The exploratory nature of this course was the best part when it worked and the hardest part when it didn’t.”*

Student Independence

On all NOLS courses students will be independent (unaccompanied by instructors) at various times. This will include time in and around camp such as while cooking or performing camp chores. Instructors may allow students to travel away from camp. Students often have independent unsupervised time, usually in town, before their course starts or between sections.

Attitude

Being a guest in a foreign country poses some special considerations for us all. There are few things more annoying than guests who are oblivious to the fact that their viewpoint and way of living may not be desired or available to others. Politeness and the cultivation of a sincere interest in other cultures is the first step in surpassing regional and economic differences and is a much-appreciated sign of respect.

The same kind of cultural sensitivity and awareness of how others live can be applied to getting along with your expedition members. We try to have at least one Chilean instructor per section. This adds a different perspective to the course. Openness and a willingness to share are the two most important skills that you can bring to your group. You should come to your course with enthusiasm, interest and a desire to learn. You need to be flexible and willing to do things in a style that may be different from your own. Be excited to face the unknown, be flexible and ready to adapt to situations and schedules at a moment’s notice, and help others do the same. **Learning some Spanish in advance will significantly enhance your experience.**

Risk Management

Risk Management is a priority at NOLS. Managing risk well is an essential part of keeping people alive in the wilderness. This is especially true in the wilderness because of the effort and time it can take to evacuate someone. Our curriculum places a heavy emphasis on the development of judgment and hazard awareness, as well as the skill and experience base necessary to manage wilderness hazards. Students are expected to take personal responsibility for following risk management guidelines that are presented to them. Failure to do so will result in dismissal from your course. During the course, you’ll often be up to seven days away from the nearest medical facilities. Weather, terrain and distance can impede communication and transportation efforts. In the event of an accident or illness, there is no guarantee that you can be evacuated from the backcountry immediately.

College Credit & Evaluation

You may opt to earn up to 27 hours of college credit from the University of Utah for successful completion of the Patagonia Year. For further information about the specific courses in which you can receive credit please refer to the information in your enrollment packet, or contact the NOLS registrar. You should expect ongoing verbal coaching and input throughout the Patagonia Year with written performance evaluations at the end of each section (except the cultural section). This feedback takes place whether you are receiving college credit or not.



Course Objectives:

Risk Management, Judgment and Decision-Making

NOLS teaches wilderness users to practice responsible habits that promote the health and well-being of self and others. Each student is expected to:

- Demonstrate a developing knowledge of the hazards in mountain and cold water environments
- Describe and consistently perform specific techniques to reduce or avoid hazards
- Describe an emergency plan for a group in the outdoors
- Be able to perform basic first aid skills to support a patient until help arrives
- Use developing experience and judgment to implement sound decisions and follow them through to completion
- Pass both written and practical exams for Wilderness First Responder Certification

Leadership and Teamwork

Students are exposed to theory and practice of outdoor leadership, teamwork and expedition behavior. In the following areas, each student is expected to:

- **Expedition Behavior:** Demonstrate teamwork, respect for others, a positive attitude and commitment to group decisions.
- **Vision and Action:** Demonstrate the ability to plan and implement course activities.
- **Communication:** Effectively communicate on interpersonal and group levels.
- **Judgment and Decision-Making:** Demonstrate good judgment and decision-making skills.
- **Self-Awareness:** Understands personal tendencies, strengths and weakness as a leader and expedition member.
- **Tolerance for Adversity and Uncertainty:** Maintain a positive attitude and tolerance for adverse and uncertain conditions.
- **Competence:** Work towards becoming competent with the wilderness living and travel skills of this course.

Technical and Outdoor Skills

At NOLS our students learn to live and travel in the wilderness within a framework of personal well being, and caring for the environment. Each student is expected to:

- Live comfortably in a mountain and maritime environment, including the ability to camp, cook, and dress for varied conditions with minimum impact skills
- Travel competently in mountainous terrain using off-trail navigation, hazard evaluation, backpacking and river-crossing techniques
- Experience basic mountaineering and rock climbing skills including peak ascents, technical rock and/or snow climbing and rappelling
- Travel competently in a coastal cold water environment practicing the principles of basic seamanship
- Demonstrate an understanding of expedition planning through learning and practical application of skills
- Demonstrate an understanding of coastal kayaking, including technical paddling skills, rescue techniques, coastal navigation, hazard evaluation and risk management
- Demonstrate a respect for and care of all personal and expedition equipment
- Develop basic natural history observation and interpretive skills

Environmental Ethics

Students develop awareness of how to apply minimum-impact ideas to their lives after the course. Each student is expected to:

- Demonstrate sound Leave No Trace living and travel skills
- Use basic observation and interpretive skills to demonstrate an understanding and respect for the natural world
- Understand the history, facts, and potential solutions to some environmental issues
- Demonstrate basic knowledge and respect for local cultures

