

Trekking in the Mountains around El Bolson, Argentina 2017.

How to get there: El Bolson is about 120km south of Bariloche. You can easily catch a bus from the main terminal and from there it's a pleasant 2.5 hour ride. Once in El Bolson, you'll need to catch a taxi to a place called Dona Rosa. The taxi driver will know where it is. Scroll to the bottom for a trekking map of El Bolson.

When to go: November to March. But, for tranquillity, try go out of the peak holiday season, either at the start of November or in March outside of Easter.

Cost per night: Refugios charge around 150 ARS for a bed or 40 ARS for camping. You cannot reserve a place in advance via the internet or a phone call. You must go to the Tourist Info Office in El Bolson to make sure there is availability. The office is on corner of the main plaza (Av. San Martin & Roca).

What to pack: Take a sleeping bag.

Food: Refugios sell hot meals for around 100ARS. There are also baked goods and freshly brewed beer. Very Shire-like in taste.

The route:

Day 1: trail to the Hielo Azul refugio. 6 hours, 15kms.

- Arrive at Dona Rosa.
- Walk for about 40 minutes and cross a bridge to reach the beginning of the trail. There will be a sign with a map on it.
- Uphill with no water points.

Day 2: Optional extra day hike (weather permitting) to the Glacier Hielo Azul and back, about 3 hours up, 2 down. If you have the time, do it! Why rush? Remember... the refugios serve wine and beer. And a glacier is a special thing to see.

Day 3: Trek to Cajon del Azul refugio. 15kms, 5 hours.

- The first hour is uphill. You will then arrive at the Refugio Natacion. Some people opt for combining day 2 with the hike to the glacier and then on to the Natacion refugio for the night.
- Its all downhill from refugio Natacion.

Day 4: From Cajon del Azul, hike back to Wharton, where you can catch a bus back to El Bolson. 10kms, 4 hours.

- Cajón del Azul is a place so quaint that you'll enjoy fantasies about being at the Shire. There is the beautiful Rio Azul with crystal blue water holes and large sun-bathe-ready rocks. Don't rush on. Why not spend a whole day here!? You can also take a detour for a night up to refugio Retamal for a more rustic experience.
- The hike back to Wharton is 4 hours, so you can spend some time at the river and make it back to catch the last bus back into town at 5/6pm. Check at the refugio about bus times.
- But, you may want to take it slow and spend a night at Refugio Playita, which is on the way to Wharton from Cajon del Azul, about 1 hour into the trek.
- Before you reach the final uphill ascent to Wharton, there is one more sublime spot... a majestic place serving icy real beer (not the Shire stuff) and hot tacos. I can't recall the name but you can't miss it.

Good to know tips:

The horseflies can be a real bother at times. Consider insect repellent.

Take lots of cash. There are many other refugios in the region and you may want to extend your trek.

Take a water bottle.

Don't forget your sleeping bag...

