

Tierra del Fuego: Land at the Bottom of the World

Tierra del Fuego is at the southernmost tip of the Andes mountain range in South America, where the Atlantic and Pacific meet. Its population is about 130,000. It may seem remote, but the area has been inhabited for 10,000 years by **indigenous** people known as Yahgan. Even today, Tierra del Fuego is home to a small band of Yahgan who still speak their own language, known as Yámana.



Ushuaia, southernmost city in the world

An **archipelago**, Tierra del Fuego consists of a main island, known as Isla Grande, and a group of smaller islands. The western part of Isla Grande has snow or freezing rain almost daily. Together with most of the other islands, it belongs to Chile. The eastern, drier, part of Isla Grande and a few small islands belong to Argentina. Ushuaia, Argentina, the capital of Tierra del Fuego, is the southernmost city in the world.

The area is a gateway for visitors to Antarctica, since it is only about 600 miles away from the northernmost part of that icy continent. Temperatures in Ushuaia range from 32°F in the winter to 48°F in the summer, and a summer snowfall is not uncommon.

Tierra del Fuego was discovered by Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan in 1520. Magellan saw numerous fires from his ship, and named the land Tierra del Fuego, Land of Fire, despite its cold climate. Tierra del Fuego is separated from the mainland of

South America by the Strait of Magellan. It is separated from Antarctica by the Beagle Channel, named after the *H.M.S. Beagle*.



Sea lions at Isla de los Lobos in the Beagle Channel

In 1830, Vice Admiral Robert FitzRoy of the British Royal Navy was captain of the *Beagle* on its first voyage to Tierra del Fuego. FitzRoy **abducted** four natives and brought them to England, where they became celebrities and met the King and Queen. One died shortly after his arrival, but the other three returned to Tierra del Fuego on the *Beagle* the following year. On this trip, FitzRoy was accompanied by naturalist Charles Darwin, who made extensive notes about the islands.