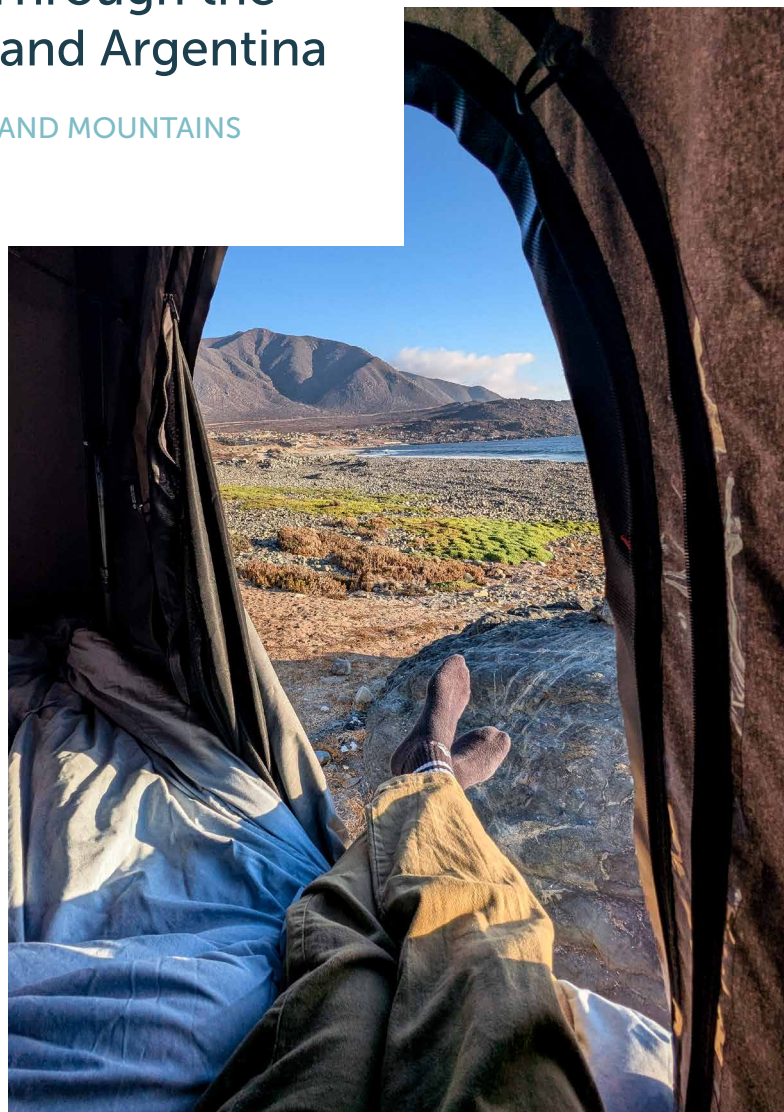




Travel Guide

A Road Trip Through the North of Chile and Argentina

DESERT, BEACHES AND MOUNTAINS





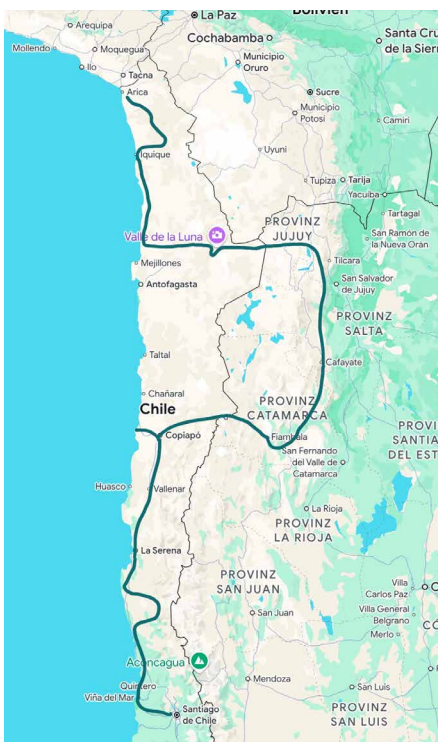
About Us

Hi, we're Christoph & Nathalie from Switzerland — both 30 years old and currently on a world trip.

In March and April 2025, we spent 35 unforgettable days road-tripping from Santiago to Arica in a Subaru 4x4 with a rooftop tent (Model Altiplano Comfort from [Holiday Rent](#)). Our route took us through the breathtaking landscapes of Northern Chile and Argentina, where we focused on exploring nature, local culture, and the region's famously clear night skies.

Useful Tips Before You Travel

- Wild camping is allowed, widely practiced, and generally safe in Northern Chile and Argentina.
- Download the iOverlander app to find both wild and official camping spots, along with helpful recommendations from other travelers — including ATMs, restaurants, gas stations, showers, viewpoints, tours, and more.
- Keep an eye on the moon phases to make the most of your stargazing experiences and observatory visits.
- Stock up on groceries at Jumbo or Lider, but buy your fruits and vegetables at local verdulerías for fresher produce and better prices.
- Credit and debit cards are widely accepted in Chile, but much less so in Argentina — cash is essential there.
- Bring US dollars in cash to Argentina if possible to benefit from the favourable Blue Dollar exchange rate. Alternatively, you can use Western Union transfers — though bringing USD is usually the better option.
- Find cheap, hot and clean showers at COPEC gas stations.
- When crossing mountain passes, make sure to check opening hours, refuel in advance, and prepare for cold temperatures and possible altitude sickness at higher elevations. The only reliable information regarding the opening hours of high-altitude border crossings can be found in this [WhatsApp group](#).
- In March and April, temperatures begin to drop as autumn sets in across the southern hemisphere — but the upside is that you'll often have popular sights and camping spots entirely to yourself.



OUR ROUTE - SEE NEXT PAGE

Don't Forget These Road Trip Essentials

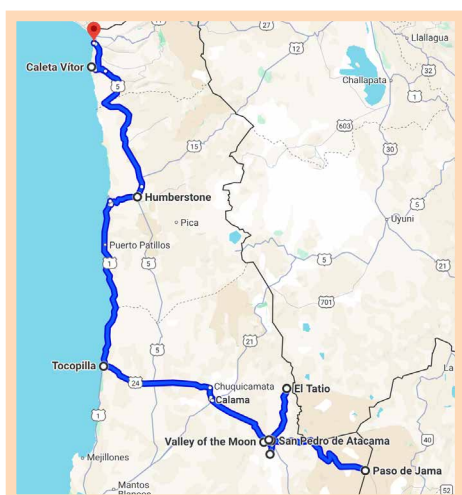
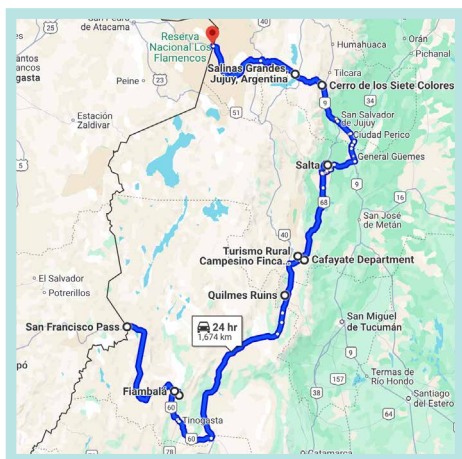
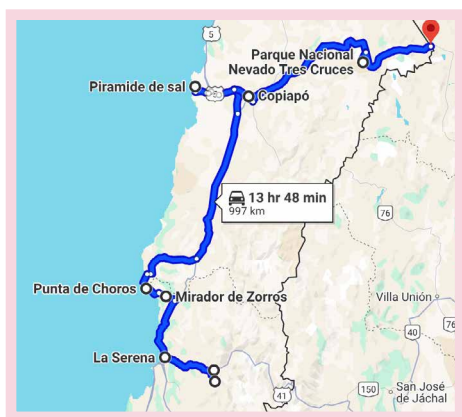
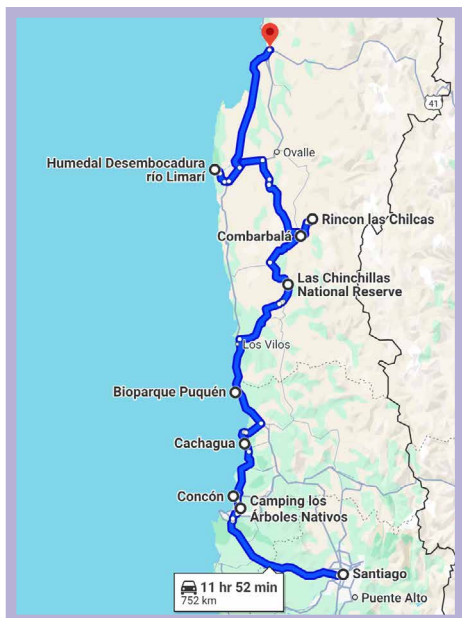
Our car with rooftop tent from [Holiday Rent](#) was equipped with top-quality camping gear, including comfortable camping chairs, a sturdy table, a gas cooker, a complete cooking and dining set, cozy blankets and cushions, cleaning supplies, and emergency kits (medical and car-related).

However, there were a few additional items we brought along or bought there that turned out to be especially useful:

- ☐ slippers
- ☐ headlamp
- ☐ e-reader
- ☐ power banks
- ☐ binoculars
- ☐ battery powered string lights
- ☐ wet wipes
- ☐ hand soap
- ☐ food containers

Itinerary

SUGGESTED TRAVEL TIME: 4 WEEKS



1. Santiago

2. Valparaíso, Viña del Mar and Concón
3. Playa Maitencillo & Cachagua
4. Bioparque Puquén
5. Las Chinchillas National Reserve
6. Combarbalá
7. Rincón las Chilcas
8. Humedal Desembocadura Río Limari

9. La Serena

10. Vicuña
11. Observatorio del Pangué
12. Mirador de Zorros
13. Punta de Choros
14. Pirámide de Sal
15. Copiapó

16. Nevado Tres Cruces & Paso de San Francisco

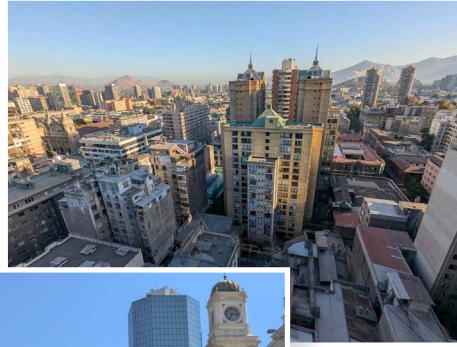
17. Fiambalá
18. Termas de Fiambalá
19. Quilmes Ruins
20. Turismo Rural Campesino Finca Ibañez
21. Salta
22. Cerro de los Siete Colores
23. Salinas Grandes

24. Paso de Jama

25. San Pedro de Atacama
26. Geysers del Tatio
27. Lagunas Cejar y Piedra
28. Valle de la Luna
29. Valle de Marte / Valle de la Muerte
30. Coast from Tocopilla to Iquique
31. Humberstone & Santa Laura
32. Caleta Vitor

33. Arica

Click on images
to open routes in
Google Maps



1. Santiago

- Pick up your camper at Holiday Rent (holidayrent.cl)
- Take a free walking tour of the city
- Visit the Museum of Human Rights
- Stock up on supplies at Jumbo or Lider
- Install the iOverlander app and download offline maps
- Install an eSIM

2. Valparaíso, Viña del Mar and Concón

- Leave your camper at the Camping los Árboles Nativos for safety, then take the bus into Valparaíso and Viña del Mar
- Take a free walking tour in Valparaíso
- Visit the beach in Viña del Mar
- Try a Mote con Huesillo drink from a street cart
- Climb the sand dunes in Concón

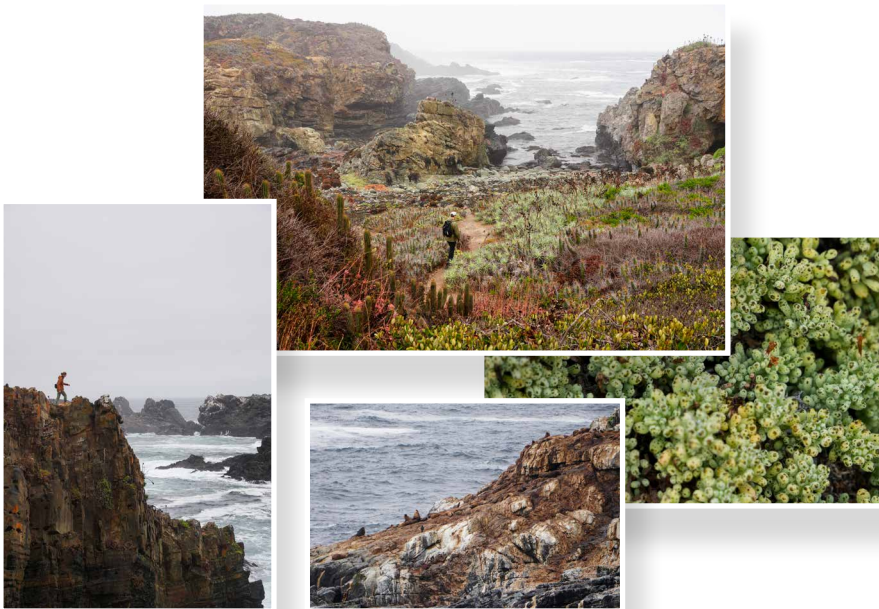


3. Playa Maitencillo & Cachagua

- Visit the beach at Playa Maitencillo
- Walk the Camino Playa Las Cujas along the coast and spot pelicans and chungungos
- Feel the power of the sea with its strong waves crashing onto the coast

4. Bioparque Puquén

- Hike in the Bioparque and discover the unique nature, encountering penguins, sea lions, birds, and a geyser
- Bring your binoculars



5. Las Chinchillas National Reserve

- Try to spot chinchillas and get your first glimpse of the desert
- Admire the night sky without any light pollution



6. Combarbalá & 7. Rincón las Chilcas

- Be in Combarbalá around new moon for the best experience
- Book a stargazing tour at the Cruz del Sur Observatory (obsruzdelsur.cl)
- Try traditional pastries like alfajores at a local bakery
- Learn about ancient petroglyphs from goat farmer Gabriel (Rincón las Chilcas) and taste his delicious goat cheese



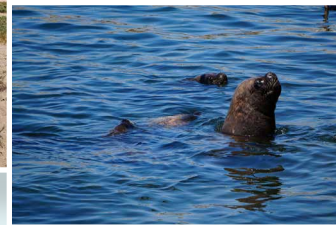


8. Humedal Desembocadura Río Limarí

- Stay for one night next to the beautiful wetland and do some birdwatching
- Don't drive onto the soft sand at the beach (you will get stuck)

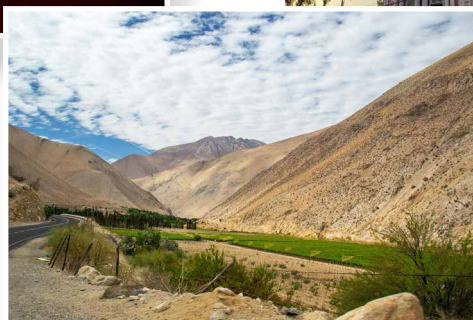
9. La Serena

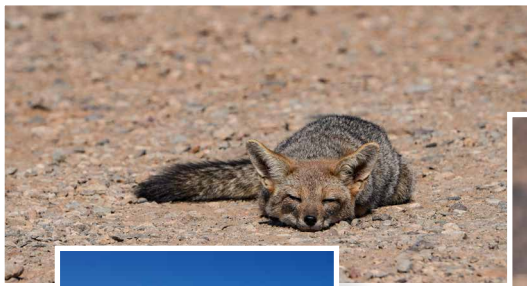
- On the way to La Serena, visit the port of a small fishing village (Caleta de Guanaqueros) and watch the sea lions waiting for fish leftovers from the fishermen
- Explore the city of La Serena and its beach
- Do laundry, groceries, and try the local cuisine (completo)



10. Vicuña & 11. Observatorio del Pangué

- Explore the Valle del Elqui
- Visit a pisco distillery
- Make a stop in the town of Vicuña
- Visit the Observatorio del Pangué (make sure to be there around the new moon and make a reservation in advance at observatoriodelpangué.blogspot.com)



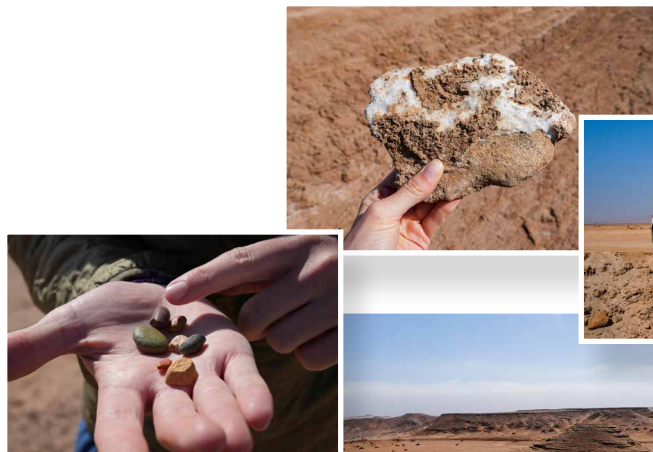
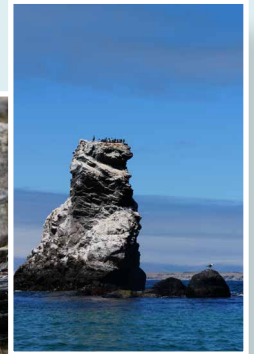


12. Mirador de Zorros

- Stop at the unremarkable sign and be greeted by sweet wild desert foxes (but avoid feeding them)

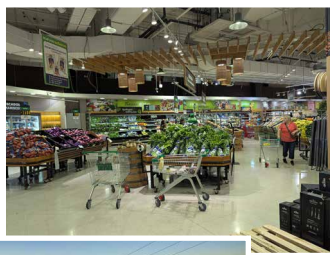
13. Punta de Choros

- Take a boat tour to the islands in the Humboldt Reserve and observe the wildlife
- If you are not afraid of the cold water, go scuba diving in the Humboldt Reserve



14. Pirámide de Sal

- Explore the fascinating salt and stone formations
- Search for colorful stones

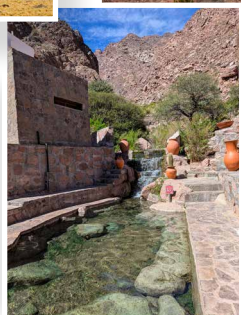


15. Copiapó

- Stock up on supplies and fill up your gas tank to prepare for the Paso de San Francisco (no gas stations for the next ~450 km)
- Don't spend too much time here, there's not much to see
- Check the opening hours of the San Francisco border before leaving; the only reliable information is shared in this WhatsApp group by the Unidad de Pasos Fronterizos: [WhatsApp channel](#)
- Try to find some USD for Argentina

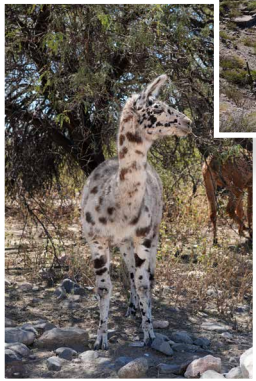
16. Paso de San Francisco

- The night before, sleep as close to the border as possible, but be mindful of the elevation; we recommend staying at around 2500 meters above sea level
- Get up early and enjoy the colorful Parque Nacional Nevado Tres Cruces with its Mirador Laguna Santa Rosa; buy your tickets online beforehand — do not miss this, it is astonishing
- Enjoy the ride over the Andes into Argentina



17. Fiambalá & 18. Termas de Fiambalá

- Marvel at the landscape as you drive from the Argentinian border to Fiambalá
- Take a short hike into the Cañón del Indio
- Relax at the Termas de Fiambalá (buy tickets at the town square)
- Check iOverlander for places to exchange USD into Argentinian pesos at a good "blue dollar" rate

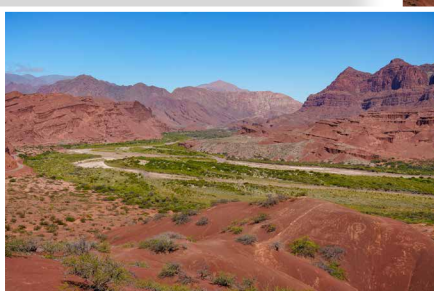
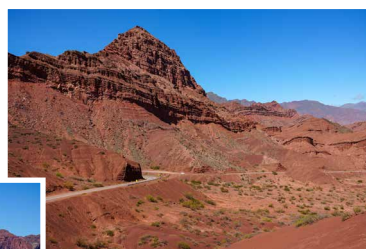


19. Quilmes Ruins

- Explore the ruins of this ancient pre-Incan town
- Learn at the museum how the Quilmes people once lived

20. Turismo Rural Campesino Finca Ibañez

- Stay at Antonio's farm and explore the beautiful landscape on horseback
- Experience local traditions by joining an empanada cooking class with Antonio's sister Marta



21. Salta

- Take the stunning Ruta 68 to Salta
- Hike in the Quebrada de las Conchas along the way
- Visit Salta if you like, but we have seen nicer cities (make sure to park your car in a secure location)



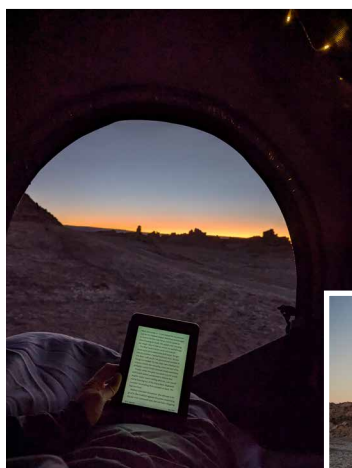
22. Cerro de los Siete Colores & 23. Salinas Grandes

- Take a look at the colorful Cerro de los Siete Colores
- Drive up the winding roads to Salinas Grandes
- Visit the salt flats with an indigenous tour guide



24. Paso de Jama

- Drive back to Chile over the Paso de Jama
- Check the opening hours in the WhatsApp group (See [15. Copiapó](#))
- Enjoy the ride over the Andes, passing volcanoes, vicuñas, ñandús and wild donkeys



25. San Pedro de Atacama

- Stay a few nights here to explore the surrounding attractions (see points 26 to 29)
- If you're here around the new moon and missed the observatories above, this is another great chance to enjoy the night sky



26. Geysers del Tatio

- Get up two hours before sunrise and drive to the Geysers del Tatio
- They are most active just before sunrise
- Bring warm clothes!

27. Lagunas Cejar y Piedra

- Float for 20 minutes in the salt lakes – a similar feeling to the Dead Sea
- Apply sunscreen at least 2 hours before the visit, as you are not allowed to use it there
- Make sure you have access to a shower afterwards (you can only shower for 30 seconds without soap)
- Reserve your time slot online a day in advance



28. Valle de la Luna

- Buy the ticket online
- Bring water and sunscreen
- Drive through the impressive valley and visit the various view-points (several hikes, ranging from 20 to 90 minutes each)

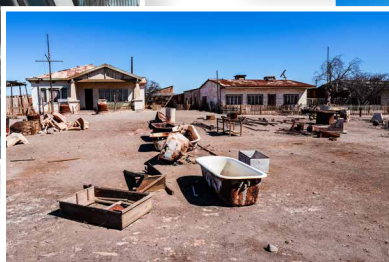


29. Valle de Marte / Valle de la Muerte

- Buy the tickets at the entrance
- Do a short 45-minute hike in the valley and over a large dune
- Try sandboarding on the dune
- Bring water and sunscreen

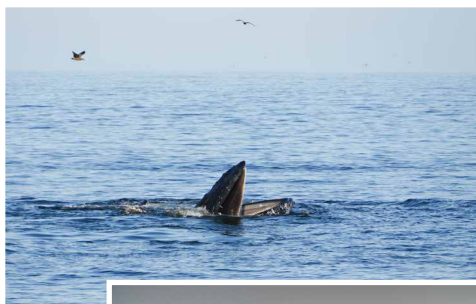
30. Coast from Tocopilla to Iquique

- Drive along the impressive coast
- Visit beaches and small fishing villages



31. Humberstone & Santa Laura

- Discover the abandoned mining town and factory
- Reserve at least 3 hours to visit. It is huge and feels like time traveling back to the 19th and 20th century

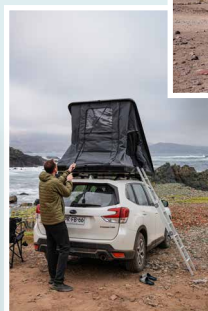


32. Caleta Vitor

- Stay at least one night at the beautiful beach and try to spot whales, sea lions, and birds

33. Arica

- Say goodbye to your camper
- Enjoy a pisco sour and reminisce about the amazing memories you just made



WANT TO KNOW MORE?

For any questions, feel free to contact:

- Holiday Rent (holidayrent.cl) for camper rentals and general information
- Nathalie (www.coconatdesign.ch or [@coconatdesign](https://www.instagram.com/coconatdesign) on Instagram) for more insights about the trip