

# M&R Tours

## ARGENTINA

### Peninsula Valdes: the Stranding Behavior of the Patagonia Orcas

Peninsula Valdes is located in the Argentine Central Patagonia Region and was declared National Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO in 1999. Such acknowledgment was based upon the fact that it is the only place in the world where you may watch orcas (killer whales) intentional beaching aimed at capturing their prey. This peninsula also shelters sea lions and sea elephants, whose male members openly struggle to seize their females during the breeding season. Within a very short distance as from this area, you may have the chance to get close to the *enormous Patagonia right whales*, play with dolphins, or simply enjoy watching the toninas overas, which belong to the dolphin family even if they look like small orcas (killer whales).

But today we want to introduce you our story protagonist: the orcas. These big mammals are present all year around in Peninsula Valdes and along the coastline of Patagonia.



While it is difficult to determine what is right or different, the Orcas in Peninsula Valdes put on an outstanding show of natural predation, which is called "Intentional Stranding" and it is the most extraordinary wildlife show on earth.

The Orcas come here to feed by ambushing the young and inexperienced seals that are born here in January & February. The Orcas' intentional stranding happens only when the sea is relatively calm and during a period of three hours before and after high tide. The Orcas choose this time as a way of protection. When these conditions are right, the Orcas will patrol the beach until they see or hear the right sound to launch an attack. At this time, everything moves very fast and with an awesome power that only Orcas can exhibit.

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You will see half or more of an Orca's body out of the water and up on the pebble beach. For every five attempts to rush and attack the seals, only one attack is successful.

The Orcas effort to return to sea and the coordination of a seal hunt requires several skills in order to reach acceptable success in the hunting rate.

Speaking about the future of the intentional stranding behavior, we believe that we are seeing the last of this learned behavior, because there are only three adult Orcas now that know how to hunt successfully while stranding. This is an acquired trick that demands training and leadership.

Among the three adults, only two are proficient at it - the master, Mel and Maga. Maga is the leading female of this pod. Mel is too old (over 40 years old) to teach and he is considerably sick with a tumor on his left jaw. With his disappearance and or death, there is a good chance that this pod will disappear as well from the shores of Valdes - pushed away by other dominant pods that include active males.

The "stranding beach" is protected from the crowds. Many people arrive here from Argentina and around the world to observe the phenomenon. However, these observers stay on top of the cliff some 50 feet higher above the beach and 70 feet away from the shoreline.



The only way to get down to the beach is to be escorted by a local nature guard. You will be escorted during the entire stay with an official that will guide you along the shore and to the photography blinds making sure that you will not disturb the seals and get too close to the incoming Orcas.

Punta Norte is a remote location on the Northern most East corner of Peninsula Valdes and due to its rich and diverse fauna, this area is to be thought of as the unique fauna exhibiting venue.

You also will be faced here with thousands of Magellanic penguins, extraordinary stretches of pebble beaches, and a new environment to explore and remember for a lifetime.

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