

Stretching the Travel Dollar in Argentina

More and more Americans are looking for ways to travel, explore and enjoy without breaking the bank. For those of you who enjoy what Europe has to offer but is finding the price a bit daunting I would highly recommend Argentina for your next visit. The most expensive part of a trip to Argentina is the airfare down and back, as once you are there it is practically free. Argentina is the 6th largest country in the world but only has a population of about 50 million almost a third of which is packed in and around Buenos Aires, its capital.

This most recent trip was the second visit in less than 6 months. Both times we have rented an apartment in BA rather than stay in a hotel. Apartments abound and even in the best locations such as the Recoleta, Belgrano and the various Palermo areas; a nice one bedroom apartment fully furnished will cost about \$80US per night. We have found both through a rental agency and highly recommend: www.buenosaireshabitat.com People in Buenos Aires think we Americans are crazy for our whirlwind vacation tours and really are impressed with and connect with you on a different level when they have learned that you have an apartment. These Barrios are filled with boutique shops, wonderful restaurants, bars, coffee houses, and of course their famous nightclubs which open at 2 AM and do not close until dawn. This is the City that Never Sleeps. The streets are lined with tall, arching sycamores giving them a lovely European appearance and making for inviting strolls anytime of the day. The effect is blend of Paris, Madrid and Milan but at one third the cost.

Buenos Aires is huge, bustling and full of energy. One certainly is never at a loss for things to explore, places to eat and local wines to sip. The park system is huge with arboretums, the zoo, rose garden, the Japanese garden and miles and miles of hiking and biking trails meandering among dozens of huge public pieces of art scattered throughout. One of the most startling sites during your park stroll is seeing the daytime dog walkers surrounded by often dozens of well behaved purebred dogs who have been entrusted to them while their humans are at work for the day.

Sunday is a day to enjoy all the street fairs. We started the day taking a cab out to La Boca where the old streets are lined with brightly painted buildings and along the cobble stoned streets the Tango is being danced everywhere. On to San Telmo where the central park is filled with antique dealers and the side streets filled with artists selling local paintings. You can end the day in the Recoleta where hundreds of booths are selling silver, art works and clothing. Nearby is the famous Cemetery where Eva Peron is now in residence. You can wander this yourself or hire a guide who can share all the amazing and sometimes gruesome stories attached to various family mausoleums. This is the neighborhood where the five star hotels such as the Alvear Palace and the Four Seasons reside. All around this park are sidewalk café where people come to enjoy the afternoon with friends and family.

The food experience in Argentina is very cosmopolitan and international in scope. If you are a meat eater, the beef served in restaurants is excellent and very inexpensive. BA has the largest Italian population of any city outside of Italy so excellent Italian restaurants abound. Be prepared to have a 2 hour lunch between noon and 3PM and realize that no one in Argentina even thinks of dinner until at least 9PM. We would occasionally arrive home at 1 AM after dinner, too early for the nightclubs, but very well fed and ready for bed. You will be hard pressed to spend more than \$50 for dinner for two in most restaurants! Enjoy!

On our first trip we did take day trips over to Colonia (a World Heritage Site) in Uruguay accessible by high speed boat from BA and have been told that beach lovers should head for Punta Del Este further up the coast in Uruguay. A one hour train ride east from BA gets you to the resort area called El Tigre which is hundreds of islands sprinkled along the La Plata River used as weekend getaways by the locals. Further trips which would best be done by air due to the long distances include Iguazu Falls, the rural Pampas surrounding BA, the wine regions around Mendoza, the colonial towns around Salta, Bariloche and the entire lake region and of course Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego. Each of these areas could easily take a couple of days or more to explore in depth. Everywhere you go you will find the Argentinean people friendly, the hospitality endless, and the shared experiences with people you meet along the way priceless.