



ARGENTINA BECKONS

Buenos Aires Reveals its Character Through Exploration

PHOTOS & STORY BY CATHY SENEAL

The most visited city in Latin America, Buenos Aires is, of course, more than tango and soccer and empanadas. There is so much more to this three million strong centre of architectural marvels, jacaranda-lined streets, 160 plus museums and historic monuments.

Although walkways are not consistently smooth and some areas look a little dishevelled, exploration into

neighbourhoods such as Recoleta or Centro Historica place visitors close to the centre and are easily explored on foot. Along with historic stops, a few quirky and unusual experiences make this metropolis feel like a place to return to more than once.

Snap a Beautiful Bookstore

Love books? The Ateneo Grand Splendid has four levels of books set in what was once an old theatre

built in 1923 to host operas, concerts and ballets. Roam the stacks, gaze at the frescoed dome, and sip a cortado in the high-ceilinged café on the original stage, imagining Jorge Luis Borge may drop by.

Roam the Parks

Architect Eduardo Catalano created a massive stainless steel sculpture of a flower that opens and closes its petals. Floralis Genérica is in a



four-hectare park within easy access of weekend markets, the one million item Mariana Moreno National Library (if you really love books) and the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes. A nearby stop for hop on hop off buses with a three-hour loop is a great way to orient yourself and decide which places to hop off at or return to, such as Chinatown, Caminito, a street of coloured buildings early immigrants once lived in or the Bombonera, Boca Juniors' stadium. Ecoparque, once a zoo, is now a nature park where ducks and other animals roam. Bonsai lovers can head to the Japanese Garden, the most relaxing place in the city.

Eat Well

Coffee shops on every corner invite you to people watch while nibbling on a medialuna, or half moon croissant. Stop for a lovely slice of cake in the



treehouse like Moshu. Cozy La Alacena has great homemade pasta dishes in a 10-table lunchtime spot where you can watch the staff making pasta. The pumpkin rigatoni and bucatini all'arrabbiata dishes are ample and

delicious but save room for the fig syrup dessert. Reserve a spot at Don Julio, one of Latin America's top Parrillas. Patrons line up outside, sipping a complimentary glass of sparkling wine, while waiting to be seated.





and sanitation of Buenos Aires. The museum is housed in one of the most attractive palaces in Buenos Aires, featuring a massive terracotta façade.

So much more beckons in this city full of mate-drinking Argentinians and dog walkers. Learn a bit of Spanish and take in the scene one amazing neighbourhood at a time.

San Antonio de Areco – A Wild and Dusty Day Trip

If you visit Buenos Aires in November, early spring for Argentina, take a day trip to San Antonio de Areco for the authentic Festival de la Tradición, a visually compelling gaucho celebration only an hour out of Buenos Aires.

Festival de la Tradición is a three-day gathering that plays homage to the history of the gaucho, pampas traditions and the Criollo horse. Because I was in Argentina in November, a friend and I booked a day trip from Buenos Aires, a trip that proved to be one of the most authentic experiences I've ever had.

Stock up at the Market

Markets are also great places to eat, and San Telmo Market, running since 1897, is a great place to sample empanadas, churrasquito (grilled skirt steak), choripan (hot dog with chorizo) and sweet desserts such as alfajores (dulce de leche cookies). On Sunday, walk the cobblestone streets and courtyards between Plaza de Mayo and Plaza Dorrego to explore antique shops, handicrafts, leather. Be enticed by tango performances here in the street if you don't have time for an evening performance at Rojo Tango.

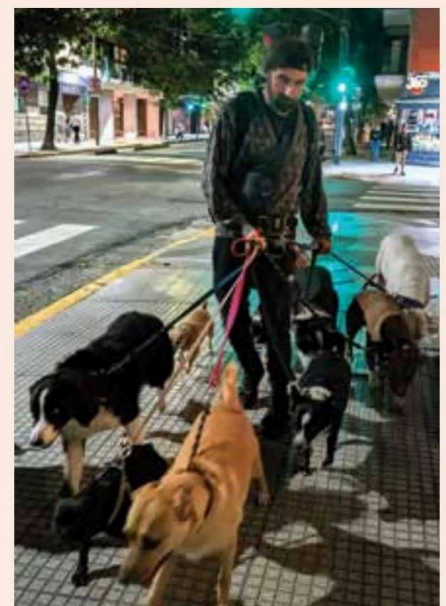
Have a Sky-High Cocktail

The Alvear Palace Hotel—designed to look like a Parisian hotel—is an amazing building to walk into or stay

in if you're seeking luxury accommodations. The gallery-like lobby is filled with dark plush colours, where once kings and presidents strolled among the Louis XV style furniture. Now, overnight guests enjoy its sumptuous spaces. Make your way to the 11th floor for a sunset Lovely Pink or Pisco Sour on the sophisticated open air Alvear Roof Bar with great views around the city.

Visit the Palace of the Running Waters

It is called the Water Museum but many call it the toilet museum because, yes, there are all kinds of toilets displayed in quirky fashion, including one from the late 1800s. Exhibits tell of the history of water



Originally of mestizo or mixed blood, gauchos are ranchers or horsemen. Their courage, independence, horsemanship and politeness are celebrated during the festival.

Both a poem—*El Gaucho Martín Fierro* by José Hernández in 1870—and a novel, *Don Segundo Sombra* by Ricardo Güiraldes in 1926—made gaucho culture legendary. The latter was based on a real gaucho from the area. Since 1939, San Antonio de Areco has celebrated in one of the biggest gaucho events in Argentina every year on the birthday of the poem's author, November 10.

A Parade of Gauchos and Paisanas

We were there on Sunday, the big day. Thousands of visitors – Argentinians, locals and international tourists – roamed the small town, grassy riverside and “rodeo” park across the historic pink bridge to check out silversmith shops, feast on asado – a selection of grilled meats – or wander the market filled with gaucho knives, chocolates, jewellery and leather goods. People lined the streets adjoining the shady ceiboladen park square and waited for the parade. Locals shared maté tea, an Argentine tradition everywhere, and kids climbed the trees for a better view. And what a view it was!

After the band announced the start, gauchos rode in alongside paisanas, or female riders. Men and women were dressed in equally impressive traditional gear. The men had berets, loose pantaloons and sashes, always with a facones, or knife, tied at the back. Some had alpargatas, traditional leather boots as high as the knee, wrapped in leather straps. Each paisana sat side saddle with a long flowing skirt covering the entire horse's rump, and all had elegant hats.

Horse bridles were fashioned with glistening hammered steel. Thick woolly hides lined the saddles. Many gauchos rode with their families – including adorable young riders who didn't look old enough to walk – and all rode in a group with their respective town or estancia (ranch).

Interspersed with the riders displaying their finery were gauchos who rode next to a female mare with a bell. A herd of eight to 13 Criollo horses followed the bell as the gaucho

steered them in incredibly tight circles in the narrow street, raising both excitement and dust.

The Criollo horse dates back to a shipment of 100 purebred Andalusian stallions in 1535, some of which were abandoned five years later, when the Indigenous peoples forced the Spaniards out of Buenos Aires. Now, this breed is known for its intelligence and endurance.

Gaucho 101

The best way to experience the Festival de la Tradición is with an English guide who provides Gaucho 101 interpretation. The company Areco Tradicion Turismo has one and two-day tours with transport from Buenos Aires. Ask for Yessica. Our guide



lined us up for the parade, joined us for asado, and found a spot at Parque Criollo to watch everything from bronco busting, herding and other gaucho horsemanship. The two-day program may include a night at an estancia, singing and folk dancing, a horse-whispering demo, horseback riding or a silversmithing class.

