

Argentina

Contributed by Administrator
 Tuesday, 11 September 2007
 Last Updated Wednesday, 21 January 2009

Argentina has a very European culture and feel. Which makes it one of the most unique and exciting places to be. In fact, most of its population of almost 40 million has European ancestry, with roots in countries such as Spain, Italy and Germany. This makes Argentina one of the destinations of choice for Americans and Europeans who want to go somewhere that they feel they can truly blend in with the inhabitants and the culture. Also, Argentines are amongst the friendliest and most welcoming people in the world. If the intricate, warm culture wasn't enough just imagine the amazing combinations of renowned world-class cuisine.

Argentina provides a very diverse climate and landscape. From the glaciers at its southern tip, where it practically reaches to Antarctica, to the subtropical regions in the north bordering Brazil, Argentina has just about every type of landscape you can imagine. You can find snow covered mountains, vast farming plains, mighty rivers with roaring waterfalls, and a seemingly endless coastline with beautiful beaches, as well as large modern cities. Over 15 million people (more than one third of the country's population) live in Buenos Aires, a sprawling, cosmopolitan city with a European feel. All of this combines to make Argentina a very attractive destination.

It would take you a lifetime to visit all the restaurants and cafes the city has to offer together with the countless tango clubs. You will even run into couples dancing tango in the streets. If you are a theater lover you will be astonished by the wide variety of plays available and you won't want to miss a world-class opera or ballet at the renowned Colon theatre. Buenos Aires, the capital of Argentina, is famous for its European style and sophistication. Since democracy was restored in 1983, Buenos Aires has enjoyed freewheeling political dialogue. Publishing houses make it the information center of Spanish America. Gregarious Argentines engage in a stimulating cultural life. Drama, music, painting and sculpting have flourished. Buenos Aires remains the scene of some of the world's major international music events, many taking place at the famous Colón Opera House.

Argentina's 36 million people enjoy more than 2,000 miles of Atlantic coastline. Not only is the political capital, Buenos Aires also the commercial and industrial center of the country. National organizations relating to labor, agriculture, commerce and industry are headquartered here. One of the more highly developed countries in the western hemisphere, Argentina is one of the 20 largest trading nations of the world.

General Information

Currency

Pesos (1 pesos= 100 cents), 1 US dollar- cca 3 pesos.

Language

While there are seventeen indigenous languages spoken in Argentina, the principal language used is Spanish. Italian is also widely understood and there are several Anglo communities.

Climate

As a result of its vast size and various geographic factors, Argentina has an extremely varied climate making a visit in any season worthwhile. Its latitude is the main reason for the differences in climate but so too are the extensive mountain ranges and the presence of the sea. For sun lovers, this country is the perfect choice of destination offering the choice of two summers every year. In general, however, for skiing you do need to visit in the winter months (which you will). And, for destinations in Patagonia and Misiones such as the Moreno Glacier and the Iguazu Falls you are best to choose the southern hemispheres winter or spring when it is not so hot and humid. With regards to Buenos Aires, anytime is fine as its main attractions are not season dependent. The average temperature will be approximately 65 degrees during the day and mid 50's at night throughout July.

Time Zone

Argentina is three hours behind Greenwich Mean Time and two hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time.

Opening Hours

Stores in Buenos Aires are open between 9.00am and 8.00pm from Monday to Friday. In the other cities, some shops open an hour earlier, close for lunch between 12.00 and 4.00pm and reopen until 8.00pm. Most shops will close at 1.00pm on Saturdays and they do not open on Sundays. Government offices are generally open between 9.00am and 5.00pm from Monday to Friday.

Banks and bureaux de change open from 10.00pm until 15.00pm and business offices are usually open from 9.00pm and 12.00pm and again from 14.00 in the afternoon until 19.00pm.

Eating establishments are open almost all of the time with the exception of the hours between 02.00 and 06.00 and in restaurants lunch starts from 13.00pm and dinner from 21.00.

Electricity

Electricity in Argentina operates at 220 volts.

Tax

If you are visiting from a country which does not border Argentina, you are exempt from all taxes on articles with a value under US\$300 and an additional three hundred if they are purchased in duty free shops within the national territory.

Visa Requirements

For residents of most countries, a current passport is all that you require to enter Argentina. To find out if you do not a visa you should consult your nearest Embassy or Consulate.

Tourist Office

Almost every municipality and province has a tourist office. These are usually located at the bus terminal or in the main square or plaza in the area. Each province also has its own tourist office in Buenos Aires and these are usually open from Monday to Friday between 9.00am and 5.00pm.

Currency Exchange

Foreign currency and travellers cheques can be exchanged at banks, exchange shops (casas de cambio), hotels and in both Buenos Aires Airports. Banks and exchange shops offer similar exchange rates but American currency usually commands a better exchange rate and a lower fee than travellers cheques.

Cashing travellers cheques can also prove difficult in the smaller towns. Commissions can be anything up to ten percent so if you want to avoid this, cash them at the issuing bank or company the most popular of which are American Express or Thomas Cook.

You can use the more common credit cards - American Express, Visa, Master Card and Diners Club. And, you can use your ATM card if it is part of the banking network displayed on the machine.

Telephones

The international calling code for Argentina is 54 so to dial from your home country you would use 00 54 followed by the local number.

The majority of public telephones use tokens called fichas or cospeles and these are available from kiosks and telephone offices (locutorios). You can also use magnetic calling cards called tarjetas which you will get in the same place.

Reverse charge calls are possible from most, but not all, of the long distance offices so you should ensure that the one you are using is before you make the call as the rates are exceptionally high even in the evening and at the weekend.

Post

Encotesa (Correo Argentina), the private postal service in Argentina, has some of the most expensive rates you are every likely to come across. Sending surface mail is a good deal cheaper but it is also a lot less reliable. In short, you really would not want to rely too highly on the postal service in this particular country.

Tipping

You should tip between five and ten percent of your restaurant. Hairdressers should be tipped about five percent and hotel porters and doormen should receive a tip equivalent to US\$1. Public Holidays

It is worth noting what the public holidays are before you travel to a country as the majority of businesses, banks and shops usually shut for the day. In Argentina they take place on January 1st, April 12th, Good Friday, Easter Monday, May 1st and 25th, Jun 10th and 18th, July 9th, August 16th, October 16th and December 8th and 25th. It is a good idea to check the particular area too as certain towns and cities also shut down during special events.