



Argentina

Argentina is the second largest country in South America. Geographically it can be divided into four main areas: the Andes, from the high plateau north of Salta down to the glaciated region in the Patagonian south; Mesopotamia, the flood plains of the river systems that eventually emerge in the River Plate; the Pampas, in the centre of the country around the capital, Buenos Aires, where the most fertile land is found; and Patagonia, the starkly beautiful, arid, windswept southern part of the country. A third of the population live in and around Buenos Aires, which leaves the rest of the country with one of the sparsest population densities in South America. The people are of mainly Spanish and Italian extraction, although there are sizeable English and Welsh communities.

The long common border with Chile and various crossing points by road or lake make that a logical combination, as does the shared border with Brazil at Iguazú, to Uruguay by fast ferry across the river Plate, and of course to Antarctica.

Climate and when to go

The climate ranges from sub-tropical in the north-east to cold temperate in Tierra del Fuego. The summer months of December to March are warmest in the south, although the autumn colours in late April are spectacular, particularly in the Lake District. The skiing season is from June to September. Buenos Aires can be very hot and humid in January and February, and quite cold in winter.



The Old Patagonian Express, La Trochita



Perito Moreno glacier



Iguazu Falls



Lanín National Park



Buenos Aires

The capital is a cosmopolitan city, often referred to as the Paris of South America, with fine hotels, shops, and colonial buildings. On the banks of the River Plate estuary, the city is laid out on a grid system, with some spectacularly wide avenues. Different parts of the city have quite distinct flavours, from La Boca (where some of the oldest buildings are to be found, many brightly painted), Calle Florida for shopping, to the Plaza de Mayo where the 'Pink Palace', the president's residence, cathedral, and town hall are located. The Argentines eat a lot of meat and there are some excellent restaurants specialising in *asados*, or grills. There are many theatres, tango houses, museums, and a beautiful Opera House.

The Pampas

The flat and fertile plains that surround Buenos Aires and reach as far south as Bahia Blanca are known as the pampas, and were a major source of Argentina's wealth during the agricultural boom at the beginning of the 20th century. The gaucho tradition was born here and in Entre Rios, and is typified by towns like San Antonio de Areco, with its museums, silversmiths, and leather craft, all of which serve to keep alive the traditions of the gaucho culture. Another lasting legacy of the boom years is the number of extravagantly built estancias in a variety of styles from French chateau to English country house, depending on the origin of the owners.

Córdoba

The city of Córdoba is an hour's flight west of Buenos Aires, and stretching north from here are the *Sierras de Córdoba*, a mountain outcrop dissected in several places by fertile valleys. Originally popular as an escape from the summer heat of Buenos Aires, today there are several estancias offering excellent riding and walking.



Riding in the Córdoba hills

The Iberá Marshlands

Iberá is a native word meaning 'brilliant waters', wetlands that cover over a million hectares and are fed by the river Corrientes and its tributaries, which eventually drain into the river Paraná. The water levels vary throughout the year, and the area is very rich in wildlife, particularly birds (over 350 species). The main gateways are Posadas, Corrientes or Mercedes, and there are several estancias offering comfortable accommodation, a few of which specialise in fishing (the main attraction is the golden *dorado*).



Iberá marshlands



La Boca



Iberá marshlands

ESTANCIA DOS TALAS



200km south-east of Buenos Aires. Guests are looked after

superbly by the charming owners. Lunch is usually an *asado* (barbecue) on the lawns in front of the house, shaded by the vast monkey puzzle trees. Riding, pool, golf and tennis nearby. Very friendly and informal. Highly recommended to those who enjoy country living or are looking for a place to completely unwind.

DOS LUNAS




120km north of Córdoba. Intimate and very comfortable country hotel on a 3,000 hectare estancia, in attractive gardens with lovely views to the surrounding mountains. Riding, walking, relaxation, pool. Great hospitality, lovely countryside and good food.



ESTANCIA LAS MERCEDES



 98km from Iguazú. Built in 1923 by the charming Lowe family, who still own and run the estancia, the single-storey wooden house still has the original furniture brought over at the turn of the last century. Riding, pool, canoeing, trips to the Jesuit Missions. A lovely place to break your journey either before or after visiting Iguassu Falls.

CHÂTEAU D'ANCON



85km south of Mendoza. The magnificent house, built in French style, is beautifully decorated (with many antiques) and set in large mature gardens. The farm has a boutique winery and also grows walnuts. Riding, 4x4 trips, relaxation, pool, winery visits. A unique property in the heart of the wine-growing area.

Misiones and the Iguassu Falls

Misiones province, which takes its name from the missions built by the Jesuits in the 17th century, is widely forested and is the area where most of the tea-like drink known as *mate* is grown. The best preserved of the missions is San Ignacio Mini, about 250km from Iguazú, but there are several others nearby which emerge from the luxuriant vegetation. On the border with Brazil and Paraguay are the fabulous Iguassu Falls, one of the most overwhelming sights in the world. The Argentine side has a well designed network of walkways which enables visitors to explore them from all angles, as well as boat trips for close up views.



Purmamarca, near Humahuaca



Iguassu Falls



Estancia Santa Inés, near Posadas

Salta and the North-west

The region around Salta and Jujuy was the first area to be colonised by the Spanish. Apart from the colonial architecture there are also many pre-Hispanic ruins from the Inca period. Salta itself has many fine churches and is a centre for the sugar cane industry. The *Tren a las Nubes*, or Train to the Clouds, runs on Saturdays from March to November, and reaches an altitude of 3,952 metres. This is one of South America's most spectacular journeys both from a scenic and engineering point of view. North from Salta one climbs through the arid *Quebrada de Humahuaca* valley, where lovely colours are visible in the rocks. South from Salta is the *Quebrada de Cafayate*, beautiful landscapes and more coloured rock formations. Around Cafayate itself there are many vineyards.

Mendoza

Mendoza, on the eastern flank of the Andes, is best known for its vineyards which now produce over 70% of Argentina's wines. The capital has tree-lined avenues, while in the surrounding countryside several of the wineries now offer accommodation to visitors. The overland route to Chile crosses a high pass and takes you through truly spectacular scenery.



Finca Los Alamos, south of Mendoza



Estancia Los Los, near Salta



The Lake District

San Carlos de Bariloche, in the centre of the Lake District, has changed from a sleepy sheep town to a bustling and chic resort in the last 20 years. Nestled on the edge of lake Nahuel Huapi it is surrounded by snow-capped mountains, quick-flowing streams and deep blue lakes, reminiscent of the Swiss Alps, but on a grander scale. In winter it is a trendy ski resort, and in the summer an ideal place to go walking, fishing, rafting, climbing and riding. There are several good hotels, many overlooking the lake. A hire car is a very convenient way to explore the area. From Bariloche it is possible to cross over to Chile, either through the lakes by boat and bus, or by road. The famous lake crossing can be done in a day from September to March, otherwise an overnight stop is made at Peulla in Chile. On a clear day the views of the Osorno and Puntigudo volcanoes are spectacular.

North from Bariloche are the picturesque towns of Junín and San Martín de los Andes and the Lanín National Park. There are also several estancias offering accommodation. Travelling south from Bariloche the Los Alerces National Park, near the small town of Esquel, is beautifully set among a string of lakes in an area little visited by foreigners. There are lovely walks, excellent fishing, and you can ride on the Old Patagonian Express (a narrow gauge steam train).

HOTEL LLAO LLAO



24 km west of Bariloche. A stunning location with panoramic views over lake Nahuel Huapi and the Andes. Tennis, pool, spa, 18 hole golf course.



Near Tipiliuke



Riding at Huechahue



Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid's farm

ESTANCIA HUECHAHUE



70km north of San Martín de los Andes. 15,000 acre estancia owned by Jane Williams, who has developed a varied programme of rides, not only on the farm, but also into the dense forests, tumbling streams and silent glades of the Lanín National Park. A wonderful family atmosphere, with the opportunity to explore some of the least populated and unspoilt natural scenery in the world. Riding (all levels), fishing, tennis.



Monkey puzzle tree



Limay river near Bariloche



ESTANCIA ALTA VISTA



 30km west of Calafate. Relais & Chateaux property built at the turn of the century and part of a 60,000 hectare sheep ranch. Six beautifully decorated double rooms and one suite look out over lovely gardens sheltered by tall poplars. Riding, walking, fishing, relaxation, visits to the glaciers. Probably the best small hotel in southern Argentina.

ESTANCIA RINCÓN CHICO



170km north of Puerto Madryn, near Punta Delgada. Family-run estancia, one of the first sheep ranches in the area established in 1880 by Spanish settlers. Lovely sitting room with open fireplace, 8 comfortable rooms, lots of books and views out across the farm. Guided walks, riding, 4x4 trips. A friendly option, right on the peninsula.

Calafate and Chaltén

Calafate is the southern gateway to Los Glaciares National Park, 50km away. The icy blue Perito Moreno glacier extends into a lake over a width of about 5km, and large chunks regularly fall off into the water with a loud roar. The rapidly growing village of El Chaltén, lies 5 hours north along a road that offers wonderful views of Lago Argentino, Lago Viedma and the towering Fitzroy peaks. The village is nestled in a deep valley with a mass of jagged peaks looming in the distance. This is an excellent area for walking.

Valdés Peninsula

The peninsula, north of Trelew, is known for whale-watching (in the bay near Puerto Madryn), and also penguins, sea lions and elephant seals. It is also one of the few places

where you have a good chance of seeing the Patagonian hare, especially if you stay at one of the estancias on the peninsula itself. The best times of year are July to October for Right whales, March and April for killer whales, and October to April for other animals.

Tierra del Fuego

Tierra del Fuego is divided between Chile and Argentina. Ushuaia is the world's most southerly city, used as a gateway for cruises to Antarctica and around Cape Horn. The Beagle Channel, Estancia Harberton (founded by an English missionary) and the Lapataia National Park make interesting side trips. North of the Andes (which run east-west at this point) is Rio Grande, at the mouth of the Rio Grande river, renowned world-wide for the quality and size of its sea trout.



Icebergs near Upsala glacier



Riding near Alta Vista



Fitzroy peaks, Chalten



Branding, Tierra del Fuego



Argentina Itineraries

CÓRDOBA, CALAFATE, VALDÉS AND THE PAMPAS



A comprehensive look at southern Argentina focussing on the spectacular scenery, wildlife, and estancia life. Best October to April.

Buenos Aires

Days 1-2: A 2 night stay at the stylish Hotel Sofitel, in fashionable Retiro. On the second evening you will visit an authentic tango house for dinner and a show.

Córdoba

Days 3-5: Fly to Córdoba and drive north to Dos Lunas for a 3 night stay (see page 9). Lovely scenery, impeccable attention and good riding and walking.

Calafate

Days 6-8: Fly to Calafate (via Buenos Aires) for 3 nights at the Posada Los Alamos, the most comfortable hotel in the village centre. Free days to explore the glaciers and lakes of the National Park (such as Perito Moreno and Upsala).

Valdés Peninsula

Days 9-12: Fly to Trelew, and pick up a hire car (which gives you the maximum flexibility to properly explore the peninsula). The first and last nights are spent at the Hotel Peninsula Valdés in Puerto Madryn, which is the most convenient base from which to take the whale-watching boats at Puerto Piramides. The remaining 2 nights are at Estancia Rincón Chico, right on the peninsula (see page 12). There are 11km of beach nearby, where you can see elephant seals, sea lions and often Magellanic penguins. Whales can also be seen in season.

The Pampas

Days 13-15: Drop off hire car at Trelew airport and fly to Buenos Aires where you will be driven (2 hours) to Estancia Dos Talas (see page 9). At the end of your stay you return back to Buenos Aires for onward connections.



Room at Dos Lunas



Magellanic penguin



Punta Delgada

SALTA, IBERÁ, MISIONES AND IGUASSU



A less-trodden path through northern Argentina, including the colourful mountains of the Quebrada de Humahuaca, the

wildlife of the Iberá marshlands, historical Misiones and the Iguassu Falls.

Buenos Aires

Days 1-2: Your first 2 nights in this cosmopolitan city are spent at the comfortable Hotel Claridge, which is very central and next to the main shopping area.

Salta and the North-west

Days 3-7: Fly to Salta, pick up a hire car and drive south-west to Cachi for 2 nights at El Molino de Cachi Adentro, a lovely small inn with 5 rooms, a working mill, and a small boutique winery. After a night in Salta, your remaining 2 nights are spent at El Manantial del Silencio, in the pretty village of Purmamarca. This gives you plenty of time to explore the Humahuaca valley and the Inca fortress town of Tilcara.

The Iberá marshlands

Days 8-11: Fly back to Buenos Aires in the afternoon, from where you take the comfortable overnight sleeper bus to Mercedes (about 9 hours). Met and driven to Posada Aguapé, with 12 rooms overlooking the gardens and lagoon, a private pier, and a swimming pool. Iberá is one of the largest wetlands in the world, home to over 350 species of birds, caiman, monkeys, capybara, deer, river otters and wonderful butterflies.

Misiones and the Iguassu Falls

Days 12-13: A day's drive north-east, with a stop at the Jesuit ruins near Posadas, brings you to Estancia Las Mercedes, where you stay for 2 nights (see page 10).

Days 14-15: Driven (1½ hours) to the Hotel Sheraton Internacional, overlooking the Falls, for 2 nights. Walkways and a railway give excellent access to the different viewpoints.

Day 16: After a visit to the Brazilian side of the falls fly to São Paulo for onward connections.



El Molino de Cachi



Cactus, south of Salta



Iberá marshlands



San Ignacio Mission

See pages 27, 34 and 35 for more Argentina itineraries