

The Best of Argentina

The distance from Argentina's northern tip to Tierra del Fuego spans 3,650km (2,263 miles). And the scope of experiences you can find here is no less grand, ranging from the cosmopolitan bustle of Buenos Aires to the tropical jungles and pounding falls of Iguazú or the thunderous splash of icebergs in Los Glaciares National Park. Whether you've come to meander the quiet towns of the Lake District or dance the night away in a smoky, low-lit Argentine tango bar, your trip to the Southern Hemisphere won't disappoint. In this chapter, we've selected the best that Argentina has to offer—museums, outdoor adventures, hotels, and even side trips to Chile.

1 The Most Unforgettable Travel Experiences in Argentina

- **Experiencing Tango in Buenos Aires:** *Milongas*, or tango salons, take place every night of the week throughout the Argentine capital; the most famous are in the San Telmo neighborhood. Most visitors will be content just to watch as dancers of all generations (most of them amateurs) go through the beautiful paces of traditional Argentine tango. Both the dance and the complex social ritual that frames it are mesmerizing. Brave onlookers can choose to dance as well; most *milongas* offer lessons before the floor opens up to dancers. **El Niño Bien**, Humberto I no. 1462 (© 11/4483-2588), is like taking a step back in time, as you watch patrons dance in an enormous Belle Époque-era hall under ceiling fans. The best dancers come here to show off, though you'll also find instructors looking to mingle with shy potential students who watch from the sidelines. See p. 148. For an authentic historical look, see the tango show **El Querandí**, Perú 302 (© 11/4345-0331), which traces the dance's roots from brothel slums, when only men danced it, to its current leggy sexiness. See p. 146.
- **Paying Respects at a First-Class Necropolis:** In the beautiful Recoleta Cemetery in a *chi-chi* neighborhood in Buenos Aires, enormous, expensive mausoleums compete for grandeur. It's a place where the rich *can* "take it with them," in a sense, and continue displaying their wealth long after death. Among the scant few nonaristocrats buried here is Eva Perón, or "Evita." See p. 128.
- **The Capital's Best Nightlife Street:** Whether you want to dine at a *parrilla* (grill), try some nouvelle cuisine, barhop, or go dancing, **Calle Báez** in Las Cañitas is the place to go. This busy street in Palermo has great restaurants—such as **Novecento**, Báez 199 (© 11/4778-1900), and **El Estanciero**, Báez 202 (© 11/4899-0951)—and some of the most intensely packed nightlife on any 3 blocks of Buenos Aires. See chapter 4.
- **Visiting Iguazú Falls:** One of the world's most spectacular sights,

Iguazú boasts over 275 waterfalls fed by the Iguazú River. In addition to the falls, Iguazú encompasses a marvelous subtropical jungle with extensive flora and fauna. See chapter 6.

- **Driving the Quebrada de Humahuaca:** This rainbow-colored mountain range reveals dusty adobe villages and striking rock formations. With so many Quechuan women herding goats amid Inca ruins, you may think you have accidentally crossed into nearby Bolivia. See chapter 7.
- **Riding the Train to the Clouds:** The Tren a las Nubes is one of the world's great railroad experiences. The journey through Argentina's Northwest takes you 434km (269 miles) through tunnels, turns, and bridges, culminating in the breathtaking La Polvorilla viaduct. You will cross magnificent landscapes, making your way from the multicolored Lerma valley through the deep canyons and rugged peaks of the Quebrada del Toro, and on to the desolate desert plateau of La Puña. **Note:** Train service was suspended at press time, but it's due to start up again later in 2007. See chapter 7.
- **Touring the Jesuit ruins of Córdoba:** Magnificent colonial architecture set in the rolling green hills of the Córdoba sierras reveals a lost Utopia of arts and learning. It's one of the few examples of harmonious cooperation between indigenous people and European colonizers. See chapter 8.
- **Traveling the Wine Roads of Mendoza:** Less commercialized than their European and American counterparts, Mendoza's wineries are free to visit and easily accessible along roads known locally as Caminos del Vino. About 80 wineries formally offer tours and tastings. See chapter 9.
- **Wine Tasting in Valle de Uco:** While Maipú and Luján make wonderful day trips from Mendoza, driving another hour south to the incredibly picturesque Valle de Uco region makes for a sublime day. Hot spots, such as the villages of La Consulta and Villa Flores, are known as "Napa South," thanks to vineyards run by some of the world's great enologists. With the towering wall of the Cordillera de los Andes as a backdrop, and gentle rows of poplar trees marking the country roads, this route is a biking and driving destination without compare. See chapter 9.
- **Sailing to Chile on the Cruce de Lagos:** Why fly or drive when you can sail through the Andes? With three boats and three bus trips, you can go from Bariloche, Argentina, to Puerto Montt, Chile, in a day on the **Cruce de Lagos** tour. Turning it into an overnight trip, with a stay on the Chilean side, gives you time to take in the beauty of the temperate rainforest and the magic of these mountains. See chapter 10.
- **Whale-Watching at Península Valdés:** From April to December, the giant Southern Right Whale heads to the protected bays off the Península Valdés to relax, reproduce, and recharge. The boats that head out hourly from Puerto Pirámides get remarkably close to these friendly giants. You can spot sea elephants, penguins, ostrichlike *choiques*, and sometimes even orca whales on the peninsula as well. See chapter 11.
- **Seeing a Million Penguins Guarding Their Nests:** Every autumn, over a million penguins return to mate on a hillside overlooking the Atlantic, in a remote area of Patagonia. At Punta Tombo National Reserve, you can walk among these friendly creatures and, if you're lucky, get to see them guarding the babies in their nests. See chapter 11.

2 The Best Charming Small Towns

- **Colonia del Sacramento, Uruguay:** Just a short ferry trip from Buenos Aires, Colonia is Uruguay's best example of colonial life. The Old Neighborhood contains brilliant examples of colonial wealth and many of Uruguay's oldest structures. Dating from the 17th century, this beautifully preserved Portuguese settlement makes a perfect day trip. See chapter 5.
- **Salta:** Salta, which sits in the Lerma valley of Argentina's Northwest, has an eternal-spring-like climate and the nation's best-preserved colonial architecture. It's surrounded by the fertile valley of the provincial capital, the polychrome canyons of Cafayate, and the desolate plateau of La Puña. See chapter 7.
- **Cafayate:** Set amid a pink, sandy landscape of cactus-dotted vineyards, the sleepy town of Cafayate has donkeys grazing on the central plaza and heaps of unlocked bicycles outside schools and churches. The sun-drenched area offers palatial-style wineries and luxurious wine lodges. See chapter 7.
- **Villa Carlos Paz:** A quick getaway from Córdoba, Villa Carlos Paz surrounds the picturesque Ebalse San Roque. Although it's actually a reservoir, vacationers treat San Roque like a lake, and they swim, sail, and windsurf in its gentle waters. Year-round, visitors come to Carlos Paz to play outdoors by day and party by night. See chapter 8.
- **La Falda:** An excellent base from which to explore the Punilla, La Falda lies between the Valle Hermoso (Beautiful Valley) and the Sierras Chicas. Argentines come here for rest and relaxation, not wild entertainment. Crisp, clean air, wonderful hikes, and quiet hotels are the draw. See chapter 8.
- **Chacras de Coria:** Once considered a summer getaway for wealthy Mendoza families, Chacras de Coria is just 20 minutes from downtown Mendoza, but it's offset by its shady, gentle, rural lifestyle. The town has great bistros, excellent small inns, a lovely town square with an antiques market on Sundays, and a great ice-cream shop. See chapter 9.
- **Villa la Angostura:** It's becoming somewhat of a jet-set stop in Patagonia; its cottages are owned by a "who's who" of Porteños. Villa la Angostura has plenty of coast line along the north shores of Nahuel Huapi Lake for sailing, fishing, swimming, and sunning. The sweet main street is tidy and quaint, with good shops and some excellent restaurants. The eastern suburb of Bahía Manzano has a collection of cozy wooden lodges that hug the shore. In the winter, the local ski hill Cerro Bayo may be Patagonia's best-kept winter secret. See chapter 10.
- **San Martín de los Andes:** City planners in San Martín had the sense to do what Bariloche never thought of: to limit building height to two stories and to mandate continuity in the town's alpine architecture. The result? Bariloche is crass, whereas San Martín is class, and the town is a year-round playground, to boot. Relax, swim, bike, ski, raft, hunt, or fish—this small town has it all. See chapter 10.
- **El Chaltén:** If you've ever wanted to relive the Wild West, you just might get your chance here in El Chaltén. On the verge of modernity, the area is influenced above all by the ever-present wind and by the beautiful granite spires of Cerro Torre and

Mt. FitzRoy, which tower above town. It's a ramshackle place, with few paved roads, lots of half-built homes, and a remarkable selection of good restaurants. The vibe is for

adventurers and nature lovers who are willing to sacrifice some comforts for awe-inspiring nature and friendly locals. See chapter 11.

3 The Best Outdoor Adventures

- **Best Park Walks:** The Palermo Park system, in Buenos Aires, is one of the world's most beautiful, running along Avenida Libertador. You could spend more than a day here, wandering this tree- and monument-lined part of the city, and still not see it all. Within the system are numerous small parks such as the Rose Garden and the Japanese Gardens, as well as museums such as the **Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires** and the **Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes**. In the Argentine spring, from late September to early October, the weather is at its best; the jacaranda trees here are in their purple-bloomed glory, making this the best time for a stroll. In summer months, locals who can't escape the city come to jog, sunbathe, and while away the day in this area. See chapter 4.
- **Discovering Iguazú Falls by Raft:** A number of tour companies operate rafts that speed toward the falls, soaking their awestruck passengers along the way. This is the best way to experience the sound and fury of Iguazú's magnificent *cataratas*. See chapter 6.
- **Traveling beyond the Falls into the Iguazú Jungle:** This is a place where birds such as the great dusky swift and brilliant morpho butterflies spread color through the thick forest canopy. You can easily arrange an outing into the forest once you arrive in Iguazú. See chapter 6.
- **Paragliding in La Cumbre.** Jumping off a 300m (984-ft.) cliff and flying with condors is what attracts world-champion paragliders to this laidback valley in the Córdoba sierra. See chapter 8.
- **Raging down the Mendoza River:** Mendoza offers the best white-water rafting in Argentina. During the summer months, when the snow melts in the Andes and fills the Mendoza River, rafters take on Class IV and V rapids here. Rafting is possible year-round, but the river is colder and calmer in winter months. See chapter 9.
- **Skiing Las Leñas:** One of South America's top ski destinations, Las Leñas boasts more slopes than any single resort in the Americas, with 40 miles of runs, excellent snow, and typically small crowds. Las Leñas also hosts an active nightlife in winter. See chapter 9.
- **Climbing Aconcagua:** At 6,960m (22,829 ft.), Cerro Aconcagua is the highest peak in the Western Hemisphere. Those hoping to reach the top must buy a 20-day permit, which costs \$200 (£110), including emergency medical insurance. The climb is not technically difficult, but it demands strength and endurance. See chapter 9.
- **Skiing Cerro Catedral:** With a huge investment in new lifts, new development at the base, and consecutive years of heavy snowfall, Bariloche's Catedral can't be beat. The après-ski scene includes chocolate shops, live music, and happening slope-side lounges. And the views take in the Andes and the beautiful Nahuel Huapi Lake. Catedral is the best ski resort in Argentina. See chapter 10.

- **Rafting the Río Manso:** There are two sections to this gorgeous emerald river south of Bariloche. The Inferior makes for a great family outing, with bird-watching and fun paddling. The Frontera section takes you through an adrenaline-heavy set of 10 rapids towards the border with Chile, followed with a barbecue lunch. Either way, it's a trip through a beautiful undiscovered mountain valley. See chapter 10.
- **Hiking to Laguna Torre:** One of the world's finest day hikes takes you from the door of your inn in El Chaltén to the base of the needle-shaped granite spire of Cerro Torre, a legendary challenge for mountaineers and rock climbers. The hike's pinnacle is on the shores of the blustery Laguna

Torre, where the wind feels like it just may blow you over. Back in the shelter of the FitzRoy River valley, you'll head back to town refreshed and exhilarated. See chapter 11.

- **Big Ice: Hiking in Perito Moreno Glacier:** Tour operators have been offering guided walks on the Perito Moreno Glacier for years, and guests from around the world strap on some crampons and head out for an hour or so. Those with a good level of fitness can now head much deeper into the glacier with a full-day hike. Peer into deep ice canyons, navigate your way along a frozen ridge, and try to grasp the sheer grandeur of this UNESCO World Heritage Site. See chapter 11.

4 The Best Hotels

- **The Faena Hotel & Universe:** Fashionistas flock to this Philippe Starck–designed hotel, in the Puerto Madero district, to see and be seen. The lobby has lots of bars, and the pool is in the front of the hotel, so players making the rounds here can quickly size up who else is around. See p. 76.
- **Alvear Palace Hotel:** The most exclusive hotel in Buenos Aires and one of the top hotels in the world, the Alvear reflects the Belle Epoque era in which it was designed. Luxurious bedrooms and suites have private butler service, and the hotel's guest list reflects the top names in Argentina and visitors from abroad. See p. 77.
- **Four Seasons Hotel:** In 2002, the Four Seasons took over what was already one of Buenos Aires's most luxurious properties. This landmark hotel has two parts—the 12-story Park Tower, housing the majority of the guest rooms, and the turn-of-the-20th-century French-rococo La

Mansión, with seven elegant suites and a handful of private event rooms. See p. 79.

- **Marriott Plaza Hotel:** This historic hotel was the grande dame of Buenos Aires for much of the 20th century—a gathering place for Argentine politicians, foreign dignitaries, and international celebrities. It remains one of the city's most impressive hotels. See p. 66.
- **Sheraton Internacional Iguazú:** The Sheraton Internacional Iguazú is the only hotel on the Argentine side of the falls situated within the national park. From here, half the rooms overlook the falls, and guests are within easy walking distance of the waterfall circuits. See p. 196.
- **Patios de Cafayate:** Flower-adorned courtyards, connected by vaulted corridors that lead to luxury suites, make Patios de Cafayate the most palatial wine lodge in Argentina. A futuristic spa offers wine treatments and splendid views. See p. 220.

- **Park Hyatt Mendoza:** The best-located hotel in Mendoza looks out on the bustling Plaza Independencia. Sipping a glass of Malbec on the front courtyard patio, you're likely to feel like royalty. Rooms are modern, luxurious, and large. There are regular events held here that celebrate the amazing food and wine of the area. See p. 257.
- **Cavas Wine Lodge:** Many new wine lodges are opening up in the Mendoza area, but for now this remarkably luxurious and private inn is the *crème de la crème*. With its spectacular spa, ultra-isolated bungalows looking across the vineyards to the Andes, and one of the area's most extensive wine cellars, there's no reason to go anywhere else. It affords true romance for food and wine lovers. See p. 273.
- **Llao Llao Hotel & Resort:** With its stunning alpine style, top-notch service, a golf course, a lovely pool, and a plethora of activities, the Llao Llao has it all. It's regularly considered one of the top resorts in the world, with a price to match. Inside, the style is that of an upscale yet cozy hunting lodge. The unbeatable location, perched on a hill surrounded by mountain lakes, offers sublime views from every window. Come here for an unforgettable splurge. See p. 305.
- **Ten Rivers & Ten Lakes Lodge:** This small lodge, perched high on a hill above San Martín de los Andes, is like having your own cottage in an alpine paradise. The eight rooms are cozy and rustic, with warm blankets and private balconies overlooking Lago Lacar. Guests gather in the bright communal loft to watch DVDs. A sumptuous breakfast features homemade baked goods, served in the historic Arrayán teahouse next door. See p. 327.
- **Hotel Territorio:** With just under 40 rooms, this newest spot at Puerto Madryn on the Atlantic Coast means you can come see the whales and penguins and still live in style. The look is very natural: stone, washed cement, dark-wood furniture, and many, many windows overlooking the bay. Territorio is peaceful and modern, with a spa and gourmet restaurant. See p. 341.
- **EOLO Patagonia's Spirit:** A friendly and relaxed home amid the powerful emptiness of the Patagonian Steppe, EOLO is influenced by traditional *estancias* (Argentine ranch farms, dating mostly to the mid- to late 19th c.), but it has modern amenities such as a spa, a wine bar, a library, and an interesting menu. It's a place to come live, breathe, and be wowed by the vastness of Patagonia. See p. 360.
- **Cumbres del Martial:** These immaculate wood cabins are a very romantic place to stay, set in a forest of beech trees overlooking the Beagle Channel. Nearby is a famous tea shop and exhilarating ski lift to an Andean glacier. Unforgettable. See p. 390.
- **Los Notros,** Perito Moreno Glacier, near Calafate: Location is everything at the Los Notros hotel, which boasts a breathtaking view spanning one of Argentina's great wonders, Perito Moreno Glacier. The hotel blends contemporary folk art with a range of colorful hues. Impeccable rooms come with a dramatic view of the electric-blue tongue of the glacier, making this lodge one of the most upscale, unique lodging options in Argentina. The hotel arranges excursions around the area and occasional informative talks. Plenty of easy chairs and lounges are strewn around the property, so guests can sit and contemplate the glorious natural environment. See p. 370.

5 The Best Dining Experiences

- **Cabaña las Lilas**, Buenos Aires (☎ 11/4313-1336): Widely considered the best *parrilla* in Buenos Aires, Cabaña las Lilas is always packed. The beef comes exclusively from the restaurant's private *estancia*, and the steaks are outstanding. The cuts of beef are so soft, they almost melt in your mouth. Despite the high price of a meal here, it's casual; some guests even come in sneakers and shorts. See p. 94.
- **Katrine**, Buenos Aires (☎ 11/4315-6222): One of the capital's top dining choices, Katrine (named after its Norwegian chef-owner, who can be found almost every day in the kitchen) serves exquisite international cuisine in a loud and festive dining room. See p. 95.
- **Café Tortoni**, Buenos Aires (☎ 11/4342-4328): This legendary café might not have the best service in town, but its historic importance and old-world beauty more than make up for that. Café Tortoni was and remains Argentina's meeting place of choice among intellectuals; even the throngs of tourists don't overwhelm the space. See p. 116.
- **La Bourgogne**, Buenos Aires (☎ 11/4805-3857): Jean-Paul Bondoux is the top French chef in South America, brandishing his talents in the kitchen of the restaurant tucked inside the Alvear Palace Hotel. A member of Relais & Châteaux, La Bourgogne serves exquisite cuisine inspired by Bondoux's Burgundy heritage. See p. 96 and p. 273.
- **José Balcance**, Salta (☎ 387/421-1628): The best restaurant in Salta serves incredibly imaginative Andean cuisine in an elegant setting. Guests can sample llama carpaccio or roasted llama medallions with prickly pear sauce, accompanied by Andean potatoes grown in the verdant hills on the outskirts of the city. They're all delicious. See p. 214.
- **DOC Vinos y Cocina**, Córdoba (☎ 351/460-8012): This small, elegant restaurant is all about fine wines and finer foods. Modern art hangs from pink-washed walls, amid immaculate white tablecloths bearing wine glasses like waiting sentries. See p. 236.
- **1884**, Mendoza (☎ 261/424-2698): Celebrity chef Francis Mallmann's restaurant in Mendoza has been number one in town for a few years now, and it remains the ultimate Argentine dining experience in the country's food and wine capital. Located inside a century-old *bodega*, or wine cellar, the restaurant serves rugged and tasty local specialties such as *chivito* (kid) and *lechón* (piglet). See p. 260.
- **Lunch at a Bodega**: Mendoza is home to dozens of places where visitors can learn more about wine—from how the grapes are grown to how the barrels are chosen. And the lessons usually come with a relaxed outdoor lunch served on a *bodega* patio, with the towering Andes in the distance. The experience is indulgent, informative, and so very relaxing. Try the lunch at **Bodega Ruca Malen** or at **La Bourgogne** inside Carlos Pulenta's stunning Vistalba vineyard. See chapter 9.
- **Patagonian Asado**: The gaucho gets things going early. The coals take time to warm up, and then they place the lamb on a cross in front of the heat, and leave it there to roast for hours. Served with a simple salad and a few bottles of Malbec, it's home cooking like you've never eaten. *Estancias* from the Lakes District to

Los Glaciares National Park humbly offer this tradition daily to visitors. Don't miss it at **Estancia Cristina**. See chapter 11.

- **Luis Martial**, Ushuaia (☎ 2901/430710): Part of the splendid Las Hayas hotel, this elegant restaurant is an excellent choice, with great views and gourmet dining, as well as fixed meals and weekly changing menus. Service is always prompt and professional. See p. 390.

- **Kaupé Restaurant**, Ushuaia (☎ 02901/422704): King crab predominates on the menu at the Kaupé, in puff pastries, in soufflés, and fresh on the plate. Nearly every dish here is refined and delectable. The gracious, family-run service is as pleasant as the view of the Beagle Channel, and the restaurant's new wine bar really sets it apart from other dining establishments in town. See p. 395.