

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

- **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. See p. 149. To experience its history, see the intimate 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. 147. **Mano a Mano**, Maipú 444 (© 11/15-5865-8279 [cell]), a *milonga* run every Thursday by Iceland native Helen Halldórsdóttir whom locals have nicknamed La Vikinga, is a perfect compromise. Even if you don't dance at all, the spectacles and the social atmosphere make for an entertaining evening. See p. 149.
- **Paying Respects at a First-Class Necropolis:** In a chichi neighborhood in Buenos Aires is the beautiful **Recoleta Cemetery**, where 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." Children won't be bored either, delighting in playing with the more than 80 cats living among the tombs. See p. 124.
- **The Capital's Best Nightlife Street:** Whether you want to dine at a *parrilla* (grill), try some nouvelle cuisine, bar-hop, 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 5.

- 4 • **Facing the Abyss at Iguazú Falls:** Two hundred seventy-five plummeting waterfalls fed by the Iguazú River make what is one of the world's most spectacular and dramatic sights. In addition to the falls, Iguazú encompasses a marvelous subtropical jungle with extensive flora and fauna. See chapter 7.
- **Driving the Quebrada de Humahuaca:** A taste of real South America is offered by this rainbow-colored mountain range that extends all the way to Bolivia. The windy road reveals dusty adobe villages, such as **Tilcara**, and striking rock formations. Quechuan women herd goats amid Inca ruins in the distance. See chapter 8.
- **Taking a 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. See chapter 8.
- **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 9.
- **Tasting Torrontes Wine in Cafayate:** Salta's wine region is a sun-kissed valley of pink sand and cactus-dotted vineyards famous for producing an aromatic white wine called Torrontes. 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. The spectacular high Andes form a dramatic backdrop. About 80 wineries formally offer tours and tastings, with those in the southerly Valle de Uco the most fascinating. See chapter 10.

- **Cruising to Chile with Cruce Andino:** 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 11.
- **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. See chapter 12.
- **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 12.
- **Watching Ice Calve Off the Perito Moreno Glacier:** It's worth the journey to remote El Calafate to simply sit still and gaze at the majestic tongue of ice that stretches into Lago Argentino. When you see a giant chunk of ice (the size of a bus!) crackle off the glacier into the lake, you'll feel chilled by the power of nature. See chapter 12.

2 THE MOST CHARMING SMALL TOWNS

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- **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. A few resorts and *estancias* are in the area, making for a great trip extension for overnighting. See chapter 6.
- **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 8.
- **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 8.
- **Villa Carlos Paz:** A quick getaway from Córdoba, Villa Carlos Paz surrounds the picturesque Embalse 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 9.
- **Purmamarca:** A little white church built with adobe and cactus sits in front of a rainbow-colored mountain in the northern Jujuy province. It is a picture that can be used in every Argentine travel brochure, and is. 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 9.
- **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 10.
- **Villa la Angostura:** With cottages owned by a "who's who" of Porteños, Villa la Angostura is becoming somewhat of a jet-set stop in Patagonia. It has plenty of coastline 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 11.
- **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 11.

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- **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 12.

3 THE BEST OUTDOOR ADVENTURES

- **Best Park Walks:** The Palermo park system in Buenos Aires is one of the world's most beautiful. Within the system are numerous parks, such as the Rose Garden and the Japanese Garden, as well as museums such as the **Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires** (Malba) and the **Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes**. See chapter 5.
- **Getting Wet Beneath Iguazú Falls:** Take an exhilarating boat ride beneath the plummeting waterfalls. A number of tour companies operate rafts that speed toward the falls, soaking their awe-struck passengers along the way. This is the best way to experience the sound and fury of Iguazú's magnificent *cataratas*. See chapter 7.
- **Traveling Beyond the Falls into the Iguazú Jungle:** This is a place where such birds 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 7.
- **Paragliding in La Cumbre:** Jumping off a 300m (984-ft.) cliff and flying with condors is what attracts world-champion paragliders to this laid-back valley in the Córdoba sierra. See chapter 9.
- **Bird-watching in Esteros del Iberá:** The flat marshlands of Corrientes province are a nature lover's paradise and can be explored by boat or horseback. See chapter 7.
- **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 10.
- **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 10.
- **Skiing Cerro Catedral:** With a huge investment in new lifts, new development at the base, and consecutive years of heavy snowfall, Bariloche's Catedral is the best ski resort in Argentina. 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. See chapter 11.
- **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 toward the border with Chile. Either way, it's a trip through a beautiful undiscovered mountain valley. See chapter 11.



- **Fly-Fishing in Patagonia:** Few places in the world are as appealing to expert fly-fishers, and as rewarding to beginners and novices, as Argentina's Patagonia. Remote rivers from Junín de los Andes all the way down to Tierra del Fuego draw fanatics who long for solitude, gorgeous scenery and, of course, very big trout. Great guides become lifelong friends. See chapter 11.
- **Lahuen Co Hot Springs:** If your idea of the outdoors includes gentle pampering and peace and quiet, this remote thermal spa deep in Lanín National Park will wow you. Small, natural pools (indoor and out) are heated by natural thermal waters in a volcanic area in the middle of a temperate rainforest outside San Martín de los Andes. See chapter 11.
- **Horseback Riding the Patagonian Steppe:** Discover your inner gaucho on a horseback ride across a beautiful horizon on the wild steppe or into the deep Andes. Horses are cherished here, lovingly cared for by dedicated gauchos. See chapter 11.
- **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 12.
- **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 12.

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THE BEST OF ARGENTINA

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THE BEST HOTELS

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- **The Faena Hotel and Universe:** Fashionistas flock to this Philippe Starck-designed hotel in the Puerto Madero district to see and be seen. The lobby has loads 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. 82.
- **Alvear Palace Hotel:** The most exclusive hotel in Buenos Aires and one of the top hotels in the world, the Alvear dates to the Belle Epoque era. 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. 83.
- **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. 84.
- **Killa Cafayate:** A long, delightful walkway of terra-cotta tiles and ceramic urns leads to a splendid pool and courtyard. The ample rooms overlook the village rooftops, and the friendly owner Martha never leaves the front desk. See p. 225.
- **Iguazú Grand Hotel Resort & Casino:** The best luxury hotel near the falls cannot be faulted. The giant rooms feature

- beautiful decor, and helpful staff keep everybody happy. See p. 196.
- **Estancia Los Potreros:** A genuine Argentine ranch located in the rolling green hills of northern Córdoba. Gracious hosts, authentic rooms, and superb horses make for a memorable stay. See p. 257.
 - **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. 267.
 - **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. 283.
 - **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 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. 318.
 - **Rio Hermoso Lodge:** A sunny fishing lodge nestled in a lush, green landscape, this small lodge has done everything right. From the cozy rooms to colorful cushions, it's wonderfully relaxing and quiet here. And you're only 20 minutes from the adventures waiting in San Martín de los Andes. See p. 340.
 - **Correntoso Lake and River Hotel:** A historic landmark that's been carefully restored, the Correntoso keep getting better and better. An interesting spa, lovely pool, great lakeside restaurant and natural decor make this a wonderful base camp in the Lake District. Oh, and one of the finest fly-fishing holes in the entire world is right out front. See p. 330.
 - **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, and a library. It's a place to come live, breathe, and be wowed by the vastness of Patagonia. See p. 372.
 - **Los Cauquenes Resort & Spa:** Situated right on the Beagle Channel at the end of the world, this new inn has just about everything you could want—a great wine bar, scenic terraces, a spa, and a gentle feel. Unforgettable. See p. 404.
 - **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. 382.

- **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. 103.
- **Café Tortoni**, Buenos Aires (☎ 11/4342-4328): This legendary café might not have the best service in town, but its historical 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. 100.
- **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 second La Bourgogne is in Mendoza). A member of Relais & Châteaux, La Bourgogne serves exquisite cuisine inspired by Bondoux's Burgundy heritage. See p. 104 and 284.
- **José Balcarce**, 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. 220.
- **Casa Tomada**, Córdoba (☎ 351/153-844-609): Relive your student days in Argentina's university city. A rambling building of stalls and boutiques leads to a rickety courtyard full of youthful clientele dining on *milanasas* and cold meat platters. See p. 245.
- **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. 271.
- **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 **Ruca Malen** or at **Andeluna** or **O. Fournier** in the Valle de Uco. See chapter 10.
- **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 Lake District to Los Glaciares National Park humbly offer this tradition daily to visitors. Don't miss it at **Estancia Cristina**. See chapter 12.
- **Lakeside Gourmet Dining in Bariloche**: The capital of Northern Patagonia has some truly excellent restaurants. The best, such as **Yuco**, **Butterfly**, and **Cassis**, are right atop of the giant mountain lakes, offering views that match the outstanding dining. Be sure to arrive well before sunset! See chapter 11.