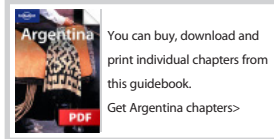


Getting Started



Argentina is cheap, and more and more people are realizing it's one of the most exciting destinations in the world. Traveling in Argentina is so easy that you could throw your bags together in half a day and be off. Of course, there are ways to make it even easier.

This section will help you know when to go, how much you might spend and where to go for more information. The Internet resources here are intended to help you waste as much of the boss's time as possible, surfing the Internet and daydreaming when you should be working.

WHEN TO GO

Argentina's seasons are reversed from the northern hemisphere's. Spring and autumn/fall are the best times to visit Buenos Aires (the summer is hot and humid). Mendoza, Córdoba and the Lake District are all spectacular in autumn/fall, when the leaves are fiery reds and yellows, the temperatures are comfortable and the crowds are thin.

Summer (again, we're talking Argentina's summer) is the best time to hit Patagonia, when the weather's milder and more services are available. Outside this time, public transport becomes trickier as services thin out. Northern Argentina can be brutally hot in summer and is best visited in spring, when the greens are greenest. Winter and autumn/fall are also pleasant.

Ski season runs mid-June through mid-October, and the resorts are most expensive and most crowded in July and August when every *porteño* (person from Buenos Aires) seems to be on the slopes.

The most expensive times to travel are the Argentine vacation months of January, February and July.

COSTS & MONEY

Argentina's cheap. Since the economic collapse in 2001 and the subsequent devaluation of the peso, travel in Argentina has become extremely affordable. You'll be constantly amazed at how far you can stretch your cash. If you're on a budget, you can get by on US\$20 to US\$25 per day – outside Buenos Aires – by sleeping in hostels or cheap hotels and eating at non-touristy restaurants. Things get pricier when you add tours and entertainment, however.

Buenos Aires is more expensive than the rest of Argentina and good hotel rooms here *start* at around US\$20 to US\$25 per double. In the provinces you can land a good hotel for US\$15 per double, while an

SEASONS SOUTH OF THE EQUATOR

Aussies and Kiwis know this already. You 'top-siders' have some figuring to do (and we're not talking about which way the water swirls when you flush the toilet). Most importantly, you need to know the seasons in the southern hemisphere:

- **Winter:** June, July, August
- **Spring:** September, October, November
- **Summer:** December, January, February
- **Autumn/Fall:** March, April, May

Once you've got this, then start flushing toilets and staring into the bowl.

See Climate Charts (p462) for more information.

DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

- Hat, sunglasses and sunblock
- Tampons – they're tough to find in smaller towns
- Ziplock bags – to waterproof your gizmos and much, much more
- Duct tape – make your own mini-roll around a pencil stub or lighter
- Handy wipes – great for those overnight bus rides
- Swiss Army knife – be sure it has a corkscrew!
- Ear plugs – essential for hostels and streetside hotel rooms
- Universal sink plug – a must for hand washing your clothes
- Dental floss – sews your clothes, laces your shoes and more!
- Peanut butter – you can't get it in Argentina
- ATM card – handiest way to get cash
- Hunger for steak

extra US\$5 to US\$10 will get you something very comfortable. Dinners can be as cheap as US\$2 per person and as much as US\$20 per person for a gourmet meal, with a great bottle of wine and dessert, at a top-end restaurant.

TRAVEL LITERATURE

One of the hottest travelogues to hit the shelves of late is none other than Ernesto 'Che' Guevara's *The Motorcycle Diaries* (2003), in which the young medical student recounts his eye-opening journey in 1951–52 through Argentina, Chile, Brazil, Venezuela, Peru and Colombia by motorcycle. Although only part of it takes place in Argentina, it's a must-read.

In *Bad Times in Buenos Aires* (1999), Miranda France touches on everything from the quality of Argentine condoms to the country's obsession with psychoanalysis, in a wry account of her stay in the capital while working as a journalist in the 1990s.

If you're going to be wandering down to Patagonia (and even if you're not), pick up Bruce Chatwin's *In Patagonia* (1977), which is one of the most informed syntheses of life and landscape for any part of South America. For a glimpse into some gripping Patagonian mountaineering, read Gregory Crouch's *Enduring Patagonia* (2001), in which the author details his ascents of Cerro Torre's brutal west face and several other wild climbs.

Nick Reding's *The Last Cowboys at the End of the Earth: The Story of the Gauchos of Patagonia* (2001) takes place mostly in Chile, but is equally pertinent to the conditions and changes in neighboring Argentine Patagonia. It's part travelogue and part history and filled with memorable characters.

Frequently reprinted, William Henry Hudson's *Idle Days in Patagonia* (1893) is a romantic account of the 19th-century naturalist's adventures in search of migratory birds. Also check out his *The Purple Land* (1885) and *Far Away and Long Ago* (1918).

Make a special effort to locate Lucas Bridges' *The Uttermost Part of the Earth* (1947), which describes his life among the indigenous peoples of Tierra del Fuego.

HOW MUCH?

Great bottle of store-bought wine US\$5

Bife de chorizo (sirloin steak) US\$4

Espresso US\$0.60

Double scoop of ice cream US\$0.50

Four-hour bus ride US\$5

LONELY PLANET INDEX

Liter of gas/petrol US\$0.65

Liter of bottled water US\$0.65

Liter of Quilmes beer US\$0.60 (store), US\$1 (bar)

Souvenir T-shirt US\$4

Hot dog on the street US\$0.35

TOP FIVES

Festivals & Events

From beer and wine fests to gaucho and horse festivals, Argentina's fiestas truly run the gamut of celebrations. The following are just our favorites; for more, see p466 and the Festivals & Events section under most regional destinations.

- **Festival Nacional del Folklore** (National Folk Music Festival), Cosquín; January (p274)
- **Fiesta Nacional de la Vendimia** (National Wine Harvest Festival), Mendoza; February/March (p293)
- **Buenos Aires Tango** (Tango Festival), Buenos Aires; March (p85)
- **Fiesta Nacional de la Cerveza** (Oktoberfest), Villa General Belgrano; October (p280)
- **Día de la Tradición** (Day of Tradition), San Antonio de Areco; November (p124)

Movies & Books

Argentina has both inspired and produced numerous outstanding books and movies. The following were chosen for their psych-you-up value.

- *The Motorcycle Diaries (Diarios de motocicleta)*, 2004 movie directed by Walter Salles
- *In Patagonia*, 1977 book by Bruce Chatwin
- *La Ciénaga*, 2001 movie directed by Lucrecia Martel
- *The Uttermost Part of the Earth*, 1947 book by Lucas Bridges
- *Historias Minimias* (Minimal Stories), 2002 movie directed by Carlos Sorin

Weird & Wacky Places

After all, everywhere has its oddities. The following offbeat places will get you thinking just how, well, diverse this planet is.

- Museo Rocsen (p282)
- Difunta Correa shrine (p312)
- Interpretive Center at San Ignacio Mini (p188)
- Gaucho Antonio Gil shrines (p172)
- Parque El Desafío, Gaiman (p372)

Parks

Argentina is a nature-lover's dream, and its parks are truly one of the best reasons to be here. For a complete list, see p50, but don't miss the following:

- Parque Nacional Los Glaciares (p405)
- Parque Nacional Iguazú (p191)
- Parque Nacional Tierra del Fuego (p454)
- Parque Nacional Lanín (p331)
- Parque Provincial Ischigualasto (p317)

Buenos Aires Herald (www.buenosairesherald.com) An international view of the country and world can be found at the website of BA's excellent English-language newspaper.

Latin American Network Information Center (www1.lanic.utexas.edu/la/argentina) This site has a massive list of Argentine websites. If you can't find it here... well, never mind, 'cause you'll find it here.

Lonely Planet (www.lonelyplanet.com) Succinct summaries on traveling to most places on earth; postcards from other travelers; and the Thorn Tree bulletin board, where you can ask questions before you go or dispense advice when you get back.

Sectur (www.turismo.gov.ar) The official Argentine state tourist board's website offers a decent dose of information in English and Spanish.

INTERNET RESOURCES

The Web is a great place to plan your trip. For websites about specific topics (such as hostels or gay and lesbian resources), see the appropriate section in the Directory (p458). The following should get you started:

Argentina Turistica (www.argentinaturistica.com) Packed with information in English and Spanish, this is one of the best all around sites on the Web.

Itineraries

CLASSIC ROUTES

GRAND LOOP

Six to 12 Weeks / Humahuaca to Tierra del Fuego

From **Buenos Aires** (p60), head to **Reserva Faunística Península Valdés** (p365) for whale watching before journeying to **Ushuaia** (p445), the world's southernmost city. From here, follow the Southern National Parks Circuit (p25) before winding your way up to the **Lake District** (p318), with a chocolate stop in **Bariloche** (p336). Bump down the lake-studded **Ruta de los Siete Lagos** (Seven Lakes Route; p329) to the leafy resort of **San Martín de los Andes** (p327) before exploring the Valdivian forests of **Parque Nacional Lanín** (p331).

Pop over to **Neuquén** (p323) for some dinosaur appreciation and continue north to the volcanic landscapes near **Malargüe** (p306). Then go to **Mendoza** (p288) for wine tasting and the Andean scenery around **Parque Provincial Aconcagua** (p301). Head north to **Barreal** (p313) and downhill to bustling **San Juan** (p308) and the desert rocks of **Parque Provincial Ischigualasto** (p317).

From **La Rioja** (p255), go north to **Tucumán** (p239) and on to the canyons of **Quebrada de Cafayate** (p232). Then head to **Salta** (p223) to journey through **Quebrada de Humahuaca** (p219). Travel across the endless Chaco, visiting **Reserva Provincial Esteros del Iberá** (p173) en route. Continue east to the Jesuit missions and finish beneath the massive falls of **Parque Nacional Iguazú** (p191). Fly back to Buenos Aires and party till your plane leaves.

Budget a minimum six to eight weeks (and plenty of film!) for the Grand Loop, which traverses over 8800km, from Tierra del Fuego and Los Glaciares in the south, through the beautiful Lake District, to the traditional villages and Andean scenery of northwest Argentina. From the wine country to wildlife, you'll have seen it all.



NORTHERN LOOP

Three to Five Weeks /

Iguazú Falls, Mendoza & the Andean Northwest

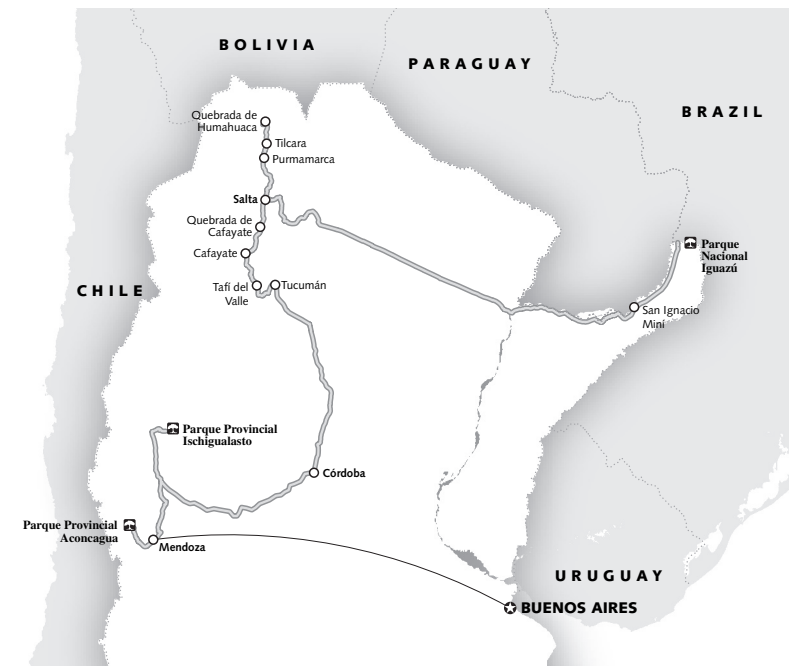
After a couple of days in **Buenos Aires** (p60), head for the heart of wine country – **Mendoza** (p288). Be sure to take a trip up RN 7 to **Parque Provincial Aconcagua** (p301), home of the Americas' highest peak. Journey north to San Juan and see the wild rock formations and dinosaur exhibits of **Parque Provincial Ischigualasto** (p317). Cut east and spend a day exploring **Córdoba** (p265), the finest colonial center in Argentina (gotta love those Jesuits!).

Take an overnight bus to **Tucumán** (p239), where you'll find some seriously odd 1960s architecture, a beautiful central plaza and one of the liveliest street scenes in Argentina. Take the scenic route to Salta, stopping in mellow lakeside **Tafi del Valle** (p244) and overnighing in beautiful **Cafayate** (p233). Suck down plenty of the town's dry *torrontés* white wine before heading up the spectacularly eroded valley **Quebrada de Cafayate** (p232) to **Salta** (p223), whose central plaza is one of Argentina's finest.

From Salta, venture up RN 9 for beautiful whitewashed adobe villages, traditional Andean culture, fabulous crafts and rugged high-mountain scenery. Don't miss the wee village of **Purmamarca** (p223) and its famous Cerro de los Siete Colores (Hill of Seven Colors).

Further north, the otherworldly Andean valley **Quebrada de Humahuaca** (p219) is a must; after you explore it, overnight in lively little **Tilcara** (p221) before heading back to Salta to kick off the final leg: the wondrous **Parque Nacional Iguazú** (p191). Whether you make the arduous overland journey across the Chaco or fly via Buenos Aires, you'll want at least two days marveling at the mammoth falls and hiking through the park's subtropical forests. Close things off with a little silence at the Jesuit ruins of **San Ignacio Mini** (p188) before your return to Buenos Aires.

Covering nearly 4700km, the Northern Loop takes you to four of Argentina's finest cities – Buenos Aires, Mendoza, Córdoba and Salta – and through some of its most spectacular parks, including Parque Provincial Aconcagua and Parque Nacional Iguazú, home of the thundering Iguazú falls.



ROADS LESS TRAVELED

FORGOTTEN ANDES & PARKS

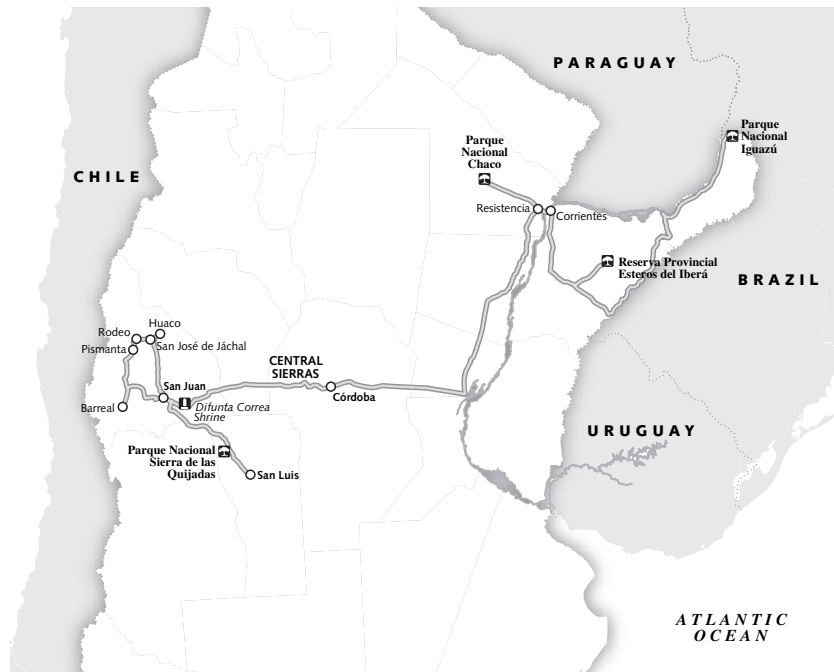
Two to three weeks /
San Luis to Corrientes

Venturing off the beaten track in Argentina will turn up tiny villages, empty roads and rarely visited provincial parks that you'll have almost entirely to yourself. Begin in the wee provincial capital of **San Luis** (p283), from where you can visit the spectacular **Parque Nacional Sierra de las Quijadas** (p284), similar to San Juan's Ischigualasto, sans the people. Bus over to **San Juan** (p308), rent a car and head for the hills: drive up to **Barreal** (p313) in the breathtaking Valle de Calingasta for hiking, rafting, climbing and land sailing beneath the country's highest peaks. Head up RP 412 to the traditional towns of **Rodeo** (p315), **San José de Jáchal** (p315) and **Huaco** (p315), and stop en route for a dip in the thermal baths of **Pismanta** (p316). Take RN 40 back to San Juan and bus out to the fascinating **Difunta Correa Shrine** (p312).

From San Juan, take an overnight bus to **Córdoba** (p265), a colonial city that foreigners often skip. After a day or two exploring the city and the Jesuit *estancias* of the **Central Sierras** (p274), grab an overnighter to **Resistencia** (p201), an odd city of sculptures and the nearest hub to **Parque Nacional Chaco** (p205). From **Corrientes** (p166), catch some live *chamamé* (folk music of northeast Argentina), and head to **Reserva Provincial Esteros del Iberá** (p173), a wetlands preserve and wildlife sanctuary comparable to Brazil's Pantanal.

By now you'll be aching for human contact: either join the crowds at **Iguazú Falls** (p191), a full day's travel away, or head back to Buenos Aires, flying from Corrientes or journeying overland.

Just because the crowds head elsewhere doesn't mean this 2850km trip lacks sights. In fact, the forgotten back roads and little-visited villages and parks make this a very special trip through an Argentina that most foreigners never see.



TAILORED TRIPS

SOUTHERN NATIONAL PARKS CIRCUIT Patagonia, Tierra del Fuego & the Lake District

Though the sadistic manage this circuit in 10 days, two weeks is really the minimum to appreciate the mystical landscapes of Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego. It's the end of the world, after all, so don't sell yourself short. After allowing for a couple of days in Buenos Aires, fly to **Ushuaia** (p445), the southernmost city in the world, and visit nearby **Parque Nacional Tierra del Fuego** (p454). Take a quick flight to **El Calafate** (p412) and visit spectacular Perito Moreno Glacier from the southern access point of **Parque Nacional Los Glaciares** (p410). Bus down to **Puerto Natales** (p427) and trek the famous **Parque Nacional Torres del Paine** (p432). Head north again to **El Chaltén** (p405) for mind-altering hikes in the **Fitz Roy area** (p406) of Los Glaciares. Then back to El Calafate for your return flight to Buenos Aires. *Chau!*

With an extra two weeks, begin the trip by heading south by bus (rather than plane) and stop in **Puerto Madryn** (p359) on your way down for whale watching at **Reserva Faunística Península Valdés** (p365). After exploring the national parks of Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego, fly from El Calafate up to **Bariloche** (p336). From here you can explore the Lake District national parks of **Nahuel Huapi** (p345) and **Lanín** (p331). Before your flight back to Buenos Aires, you may even be able to squeeze in trips to nearby **Parque Nacional Lago Puelo** (p351) and **Parque Nacional Los Alerces** (p398). By then, you'll deserve a night on the town in Buenos Aires.



WINE TOUR

Mendoza, San Juan & the Andean Northwest

Prime your palate for Argentina's world-class wine. Following the grape juice trail will not only give you a serious sampling of the country's finest libation, you'll be introduced to many of its most interesting regions. Uncork your trip by starting in beautiful **Mendoza** (p288), Argentina's Andes-flanked wine capital. Be certain to stop at **Bodega La Rural** (p297), home of South America's largest (and best) wine museum. Squeeze in a day trip to **Puente del Inca** (p301) and the lung-busting heights of the **Cristo Redentor** (p303) on the Chilean border.

Take a crack-of-dawn bus to **San Rafael** (p303), rent a bike and ride out to the city's wineries, making **Bianchi Champañera** (p304) your last stop for a bit of bubbly. The next day, head to **San Juan** (p308) to try the excellent Syrah and regional whites produced near this leafy provincial capital. Squeeze in a day trip to **Parque Provincial Ischigualasto** (p317) or up RN 40 to **San José de Jáchal** (p315) if you can. From San Juan, take an overnight bus to **Tucumán** (p239), and head the next day to lovely little **Cafayate** (p233) to hit a few wineries and dazzle your tastebuds with the regional *torrontés* white wine. Return to Tucumán for your flight back to Buenos Aires.



Snapshot

FAST FACTS

Population: 39,144,750
(12 million live in greater Buenos Aires)

Population growth rate:
1.02%

Adult literacy rate: 97.1%

Inflation rate (2004):
13.4%

Population below poverty
line: 51.7%

Unemployment rate:
17-23%

Area: 2,766,890 sq km or
about one-third the size
of the contiguous US

Number of psychologists:
about one per 900 inhabit-
ants (the highest ratio in
the world)

Percentage of Argentine
households consuming
yerba mate: 92%

Approximate national
annual consumption of
yerba mate: 200,000 tons

The big news for most Argentina-bound travelers is that the country is suddenly cheap. Before the economy crashed in December 2001, the Argentine peso was pegged to the US dollar, making Argentina one of South America's most expensive countries to visit. After the crash, the peso plummeted to four to the dollar, and savvy European and North American travelers began pouring in to gobble down giant Argentine steaks at US\$3 a pop and travel an exciting country that had long been too costly. The peso has since leveled off at about three to the dollar, and Argentina remains one of the best-value countries in South America.

Of course, a tanking economy means different things for Argentines. For the country's middle and lower classes, it's been hell. In 2001, those with bank accounts saw caps placed on their withdrawals (see p34), and the country's poor faced limits on what they could eat.

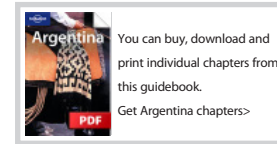
Perhaps the most tightly wound moment of all was the protest known as the *cacerolazo* (from the word *cacerola* or pan). It began on December 20, 2001, when people began taking to their balconies in Buenos Aires banging pots and pans. The banging moved to the streets, then to cities throughout Argentina, and finally culminated in the resignation of President de la Rúa (see p35). The *cacerolazo* has become symbolic of discontent, and as a form of social protest has spread throughout Latin America and even the world. With Argentina's economy still on the skids, you may become familiar with the sound of the *cacerolazo*. Just listen for the pans.

Speaking of toppling the big boys, Argentina beat the US in the battle for the 2004 Olympic gold in basketball – no small feat. Sports, of course, are always a hot topic in Argentina, none more so than soccer (p38). The country's disgraced golden boy Diego Maradona continues to rear his head entering and reentering drug rehab and, not surprisingly, the Argentine press.

Transvestites have also been getting their share of press, appearing on everything from talk shows to news hours. You'll surely get to know Florencia de la V, the beloved transvestite star of *Los Roldán*, Argentina's most popular TV sitcom. De la V appeared naked and sporting a photo-enhanced pregnant belly on the cover of *Rolling Stone* in 2004, and continues to dazzle the Argentine public.

On December 30, 2004, an overcrowded Buenos Aires nightclub caught fire, killing 188 people and wounding hundreds more. City mayor Arribal Ibarra closed the city's nightclubs for two weeks of mourning, two city officials resigned, and thousands of protesters demanded the mayor's resignation for not enforcing safety standards. Ibarra did not resign, but the club owner was later charged with involuntary manslaughter.

In January 2005, after a year of self-imposed exile in Chile, ex-president Carlos Menem (p34) returned to Argentina after federal judges dropped two international warrants for his arrest. Although he still faced charges of embezzlement and tax fraud, and despite the fact most Argentines blame his corruption for the country's economic collapse, Menem vowed to run again for president in 2007. Keep your eyes peeled.



© Lonely Planet Publications. To make it easier for you to use, access to this chapter is not digitally restricted. In return, we think it's fair to ask you to use it for personal, non-commercial purposes only. In other words, please don't upload this chapter to a peer-to-peer site, mass email it to everyone you know, or resell it. See the terms and conditions on our site for a longer way of saying the above – 'Do the right thing with our content.'