



# Salta & the Andean Northwest

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## Why Go?

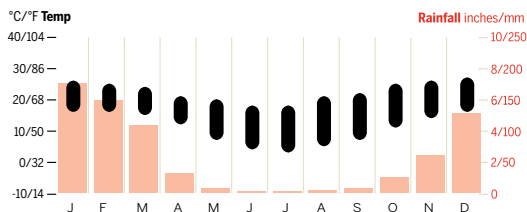
Argentina's northwest sits lofty, dry and tough beneath the mighty Andes. Nature works magic here with stone: weird, wonderful, tortured rockscapes are visible throughout.

There's a definite Andean feel characterizing the area's indigenous communities, traditional handicrafts, llamas and Inca ruins, and the high, arid puna (Andean highlands) stretching into Chile and Bolivia. This region's cities were Argentina's first colonial settlements and have special appeal.

Several popular routes await. From travelers' favorite Salta, head through a national park studded with cactus sentinels to gorgeous Cachi, then down through traditional weaving communities in the Valles Calchaquíes to Cafayate, home of some of Argentina's best wines. Another route from Salta soars upward to the puna mining settlement of San Antonio de los Cobres, heads north to the spectacular salt plains of the Salinas Grandes, and then down to the visually wondrous and history-filled Quebrada de Humahuaca.

## When to Go

### Salta



**Feb** Temperatures are high but Carnival celebrations are worth seeing.

**Jul & Aug** Chilly up on the puna (Andean highlands), but pleasant around the Salta region.

**Sep & Oct** Top compromise: fewer tourists in Salta and acceptable spring temperatures.

## SALTA & JUJUY PROVINCES

Intertwined like yin and yang, Argentina's northwestern provinces harbor an inspiring wealth of natural beauty and traditional culture. Bounded by Bolivia to the north and Chile to the west, the zone climbs from sweaty cloud forests westward to the puna highlands and some of the most majestic peaks of the Andes cordillera.

The two capitals, especially colonial Salta, which is beloved by travelers, are launchpads for exploring the jagged chromatic ravines of the Quebrada de Cafayate and Quebrada de Humahuaca; the villages of the Valles Calchaqufes, rich in artisanal handicrafts; the stark puna scenery; the national parks of Calilegua and El Rey; and for nosing aromatic Cafayate torrontés (dry white wine).

### Salta

☎ 0387 / POP 655,600 / ELEV 1187M

Sophisticated Salta is a favorite, engaging active minds with its outstanding museums and lighting romantic candles with its plaza-side cafes and the live *música folklórica* of its vibrant *peñas* (folk music clubs). It offers the facilities (and the traffic and noise) of a large town, retains the comfortable pace of a smaller place and preserves more colonial architecture than most Argentine cities.

Founded in 1582, it's now the most touristed spot in northwest Argentina, and offers numerous accommodation options. The center bristles with tour agents: this is the place to get things organized for onward travel. A popular option is to hire a car here to explore the surrounding area.

### 👁 Sights

#### ★ Museo de Arqueología de Alta Montaña

MUSEUM

(MAAM; [www.maam.gob.ar](http://www.maam.gob.ar); Mitre 77; foreigner/Argentine AR\$70/50; ☎ 11am-7:30pm Tue-Sun) One of northern Argentina's premier museums, this has a serious and informative exhibition focusing on Inca culture and, in particular, the child sacrifices left on some of the Andes' most imposing peaks.

The centerpiece is the mummified body of one of three children (rotated every six months) discovered at the peak of Llullaillaco (p222) in 1999. It was a controversial decision to display the bodies and it is a powerful experience to come face-to-face with them.

Intricately plaited hair and clothes are perfectly preserved, and their faces reflect – you decide – a distant past or a typical 21st-century Salta face; a peaceful passing or a tortured death.

The grave goods impress by their immediacy, with colors as fresh as the day they were produced. The *illas* (small votive figurines of animals and humans) are of silver, gold, shell and onyx, and many are clothed in textiles. It's difficult to imagine that a more privileged look at pre-Columbian South American culture will ever be offered us. Also exhibited is the 'Reina del Cerro,' a tomb-robbed mummy that ended up here after a turbulent history. Good videos give background on the sacrifices and on the Qhapaq Ñan, the Inca road system given Unesco status in 2014. There's a shop and library as well as a cafe-bar with terrace.

#### Museo Histórico del Norte

MUSEUM

(Caseros 549; admission AR\$20; ☎ 9am-6pm Tue-Fri, 9am-1:30pm & 2:30-7pm Sat, 9am-1:30pm Sun) Set on the plaza in the lovely *cabildo* (town hall), this collection ranges from pre-Columbian ceramics through colonial-era religious art (admire the fine pulpit from Salta's Jesuit church) and displays on Salta in the 19th and 20th centuries. The endless portraits of Salta's governors wouldn't be out of place in a beard-and-mustache museum, while the transportation collection includes an enormous 1911 Renault that puts Hummers to shame.

#### Iglesia San Francisco

CHURCH

([www.conventosanfranciscosalta.com](http://www.conventosanfranciscosalta.com); cnr Caseros & Córdoba; ☎ 8am-1pm & 2-9pm Mon-Sat, 8am-1pm & 5-9pm Sun) This magenta-and-yellow church is Salta's most striking. The exuberant facade is topped by a slender tower; inside are several much-venerated images, including the Niño Jesús de Aracoeli, a rather spooky crowned figure. There's a lovely garden cloister, accessed via tours (English available, AR\$40; from 10am to 1pm and 2pm to 6:30pm Tuesday to Saturday) that include a mediocre museum of religious art and treasures.

#### ★ Pajcha – Museo de Arte Étnico Americano

MUSEUM

([www.museopajchasalta.com.ar](http://www.museopajchasalta.com.ar); 20 de Febrero 831; foreigner/Argentine AR\$40/20; ☎ 10am-1pm & 4-8pm Mon-Sat) This eye-opening private museum is a must-see if you're interested in indigenous art and culture. Juxtaposing archaeological finds with contemporary and recent artisanal work from all over Latin America, it takes an encouragingly broad