

# Understand Argentina

## ARGENTINA TODAY ..... 576

Economic ups and downs, a promising new president and the controversial Argentine pope – this country never bores.

## HISTORY ..... 578

Spanish colonialism, fierce independence, the golden years and the Dirty War – and all that before the roller-coaster economic years.

## LIFE IN ARGENTINA.....588

Devotion to family, *fútbol* (soccer) and weekly *asados* (barbecues) – find out what makes the everyday Argentine tick.

## THE SOUNDS OF ARGENTINA.....590

The sultry tango is only one facet of Buenos Aires' music; there's also rock, folk, jazz and electronica.

## LITERATURE & CINEMA .....592

Over the last century, Argentina has produced a rich literary heritage and a vibrant, evolving film industry.

## THE NATURAL WORLD .....594

Coastline, mountain ranges, grasslands and a wide range of flora and fauna – nature in Argentina is stunning.

# Argentina Today

**Argentina has two faces: it's a country that has harbored both prosperity and decline. Today inflation remains rampant and the economy continues to stumble, yet an economic comeback is always around the corner. A new president was sworn in after more than a decade of Kirchner presidential rule, bringing optimism and welcome change to the country. Meanwhile, Pope Francis continues to shake up the Catholic Church and status quo wherever he goes, but remains beloved by millions.**

## Best in Print

**Kiss of the Spider Woman** (Manuel Puig, 1976) Two prisoners and their developing relationship in a Buenos Aires prison; made into the Oscar-winning 1985 film.

**In Patagonia** (Bruce Chatwin, 1977) Evocative writing on Patagonia's history and mystique.

**The Motorcycle Diaries** (Ernesto Che Guevara et al, 1993) Based on the travel diary of the Argentine-born revolutionist.

**And the Money Kept Rolling In (and Out)** (Paul Blustein, 2005) How the IMF helped bankrupt Argentina.

## Best on Film

**La historia oficial** (The Official Story, 1985) Oscar-winning film on the Dirty War.

**Nueve reinas** (Nine Queens, 2000) Two con men chasing the big score.

**El secreto de sus ojos** (The Secret in Their Eyes, 2009) Thriller that won the 2010 Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film.

**Relatos salvajes** (Wild Tales, 2014) Black comedy showcasing six short, entertaining stories.

## A New Beginning

In December 2015 Mauricio Macri took over Argentina's presidential reins. He had been Buenos Aires' mayor since 2007 and was a former president of the Boca Juniors *fútbol* team. In a surprising run-off election he narrowly beat Cristina Kirchner's preferred candidate, Daniel Scioli, ending 12 years of Peronist-run government. Macri promised drastic economic changes, and he immediately started implementing them: controls over foreign currencies were abolished (essentially ending the 'blue' – ie black – market for US dollars), export taxes were lowered to boost agricultural trade, and thousands of redundant public-sector jobs were eliminated.

His idea is to encourage economic growth and foreign investment (once again) while reducing Argentina's immense deficit and, eventually, its unsustainable inflation rate. It's quite a difference from Cristina Kirchner's practices, which implemented heavy state intervention and spending, and used the country's central bank reserves to artificially prop up the peso. Macri also plans to strengthen ties with economic powers like Brazil and the USA, while cooling off relations with Iran and Venezuela, which Cristina had forged. His pro-business, free-market reform stances set him apart from his leftist, pro-government predecessor. Argentines asked for a radically different president – and they got one.

## Economic Woes

Argentina's currency devaluation in 2002 caused surging demand for its suddenly cheap agricultural products. Helped along by skyrocketing government spending and strong growth in Brazil and China, this economic boom lasted through 2007 and revved up again in 2010. But high inflation, a stronger peso and lower commodity prices reined in the economy.