



# Salta & the Andean Northwest

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## Why Go?

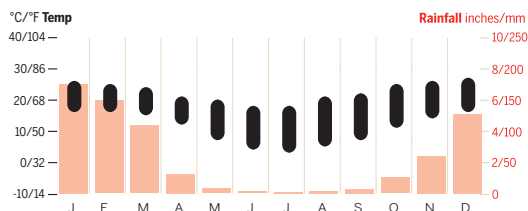
Argentina's northwest sits lofty, dry and tough beneath the mighty Andes. Nature works magic here with stone: weird, wonderful, tortured rockscapes are visible throughout.

There's a definite Andean feel with traditional handi-crafts, Quechua-speaking pockets, coca leaves, llamas, indigenous heritage, Inca ruins, and the high, arid puna (Andean highlands) stretching west to Chile and north to Bolivia. The region's cities were Argentina's first colonial settlements and have a special appeal.

Several popular routes await. From travelers' favorite Salta, head through a national park studded with cactus sentinels on your way 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 upwards 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-Mar** Temperatures high on the puna, but Carnaval celebrations are worth seeing.

**Jul-Aug** Chilly up on the puna, but it is the most pleasant time to visit.

**Sep-Oct** A good compromise, with fewer tourists in Salta and acceptable spring temperatures.

## National Parks

This region holds some important national parks, mostly in Jujuy and Salta provinces. **Parque Nacional Calilegua** (p216) preserves subtropical cloud forest and is home to an array of birdlife, as well as pumas and jaguars. Far-flung **Parque Nacional Baritú** (p216) contains subtropical montane forest and is home to monkeys, big cats, otters and forest squirrels. **Parque Nacional El Rey** (p205) is the most biologically diverse park in the country and teems with birdlife, including toucans. Between Salta and Cachi, **Parque Nacional Los Cardones** (p236) is full of cactus-studded photo opportunities. Much further south, **Parque Nacional Talampaya** (p266) has aboriginal petroglyphs, photogenic rock formations and local flora and fauna.

## JUJUY & SALTA PROVINCES

Intertwined like yin and yang, Argentina's two 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 the sweaty cloud forests of Las Yungas westward to the puna and some of the most majestic peaks of the Cordillera de los Andes.

The two capitals – comfortable Jujuy and colonial, beloved-of-travelers Salta – are launch pads for exploration of the jagged chromatic ravines of the Quebrada de Cafayate and Quebrada de Humahuaca; for the villages of the Valles Calchaquíes, rich in artisanal handicrafts; for the stark puna scenery; for nosing of the aromatic Cafayate torrónes whites; or for rough exploration in the remote national parks of El Rey or Baritú.

## Jujuy

📍0388 / POP 278,336 / ELEV 1201M

Of the trinity of northwestern cities, Jujuy lacks the colonial sophistication of Salta or urban vibe of Tucumán, but nevertheless shines for its livable feel, enticing restaurants and gregarious, good-looking locals. It's got the most indigenous feel of any of Argentina's cities.

San Salvador de Jujuy (commonly called simply Jujuy) was founded in 1593 at the third attempt, after the previous two incarnations had been razed by miffed indigenous groups who hadn't given planning permission.

The province of Jujuy bore the brunt of conflict during the wars of independence, with Spain launching repeated invasions down the Quebrada de Humahuaca from Bolivia; Jujuy was famously evacuated in what is known as the *éxodo jujeño*.

The city's name is roughly pronounced *hoo-hooey*; if it sounds like an arch exclamation of surprise, you're doing well.

## 📍 Sights

### 🆓 Culturarte

GALLERY

(cnr San Martín y Sarmiento; 🕒8:30am-midnight Mon-Fri, 8:30am-1pm & 4:30pm-midnight Sat & Sun) An attractive modern space, the Culturarte showcases exhibitions by well-established Argentine contemporary artists. There's also a cafe-bar with a great little balcony elevated over the street.

### Museo Arqueológico Provincial

MUSEUM

(Lavalle 434; admission AR\$2; 🕒8am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm & 3-7pm Sat & Sun) The standout exhibit is a vivid 3000-year-old fertility goddess figure, depicted with snakes for hair and in the act of giving birth. She's a product of the advanced San Francisco culture, which existed in Las Yungas from about 1400 BC to 800 BC. There's also a selection of skulls with cranial deformities (practiced for cosmetic reasons) and mummified bodies.

### Museo Histórico Franciscano

MUSEUM

(Belgrano s/n; admission AR\$5; 🕒9am-1pm & 5-9pm Mon-Sat) Alongside the San Francisco church and convent, this retains a strong selection of colonial art from the Cuzco school,

## COCA CHEWING

Once you get seriously north, you see signs outside shops advertising *coca* and *bica*. The former refers to the leaves, mainly grown in Peru and Bolivia, which are used to produce cocaine. *Bica* refers to bicarbonate of soda, an alkaline that, when chewed along with the leaves (as is customary among Andean peoples), releases their mild stimulant effect and combats fatigue and hunger. Chewing coca and possessing small amounts for personal use is legal, but only in the northern provinces of Salta and Jujuy. Taking them into other provinces or into Chile is illegal, and there are plenty of searches.