

Understand Argentina

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Economic ups and downs, Queen Cristina and the new Argentine pope – this country never bores.

HISTORY 574

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

LIFE IN ARGENTINA.....584

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

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

LITERATURE & CINEMA588

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

THE NATURAL WORLD590

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 is rampant, the economy continues to stumble and the black market for US dollars remains robust despite government crackdowns – yet an economic comeback is always around the corner. And though president Cristina Kirchner's popularity goes up and down, she's a master of resilience – you should never count her out.

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 (1993, Ernesto Che Guevara et al) 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.

Pizza, birra, faso (Pizza, Beer, Cigarettes, 1998) Four Buenos Aires gangster youths try to survive on the city streets.

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.

Cristina's Reign

Since Cristina Kirchner's re-election in 2011, things haven't been so rosy. Her popularity plunged as the economy hit the brakes, inflation skyrocketed and crime kept rising. *The Economist* and international agencies such as the IMF have accused her government of cooking the books (especially inflation figures). Her health has been on the rocks. She had to have surgery to remove her thyroid in 2012, and she underwent a procedure to remove a blood clot on her brain in 2013. She lost even more political support in the October 2013 mid-term elections. This made the possibility of a Chavez-like third term – currently not allowed in the constitution, but something many thought Cristina was after – very unlikely.

But nobody can write 'la presidenta' off yet – she still maintains majorities in both chambers, her term won't be up until 2015 and she's been known to make comebacks. And despite her many detractors, Cristina has made admirable social strides. She has addressed abuses perpetrated by the military dictatorship, championed same-sex marriage laws and, above all, supported the blue-collar classes. And her people will still love her for it, just as they did Evita.

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 have reined in the economy.

In October 2011, in an effort to curb the flow of capital heading overseas, the government started requiring Argentines to substantiate their purchases of US dollars. This created a black market for US dollars, which are