

NEIGHBORHOODS

top picks

- **Cementerio de la Recoleta** (p86) Get lost in a mazelike city of the dead.
- **Plaza de Mayo** (p63) Be part of BA's culture of protest at this historic plaza.
- **Teatro Colón** (p71) Join the audience at this imposing world-class arts venue.
- **El Zanjón de Granados** (p77) Glimpse this city's unique architectural history.
- **Reserva Ecológica Costanera Sur** (p70) Picnic, cycle and play happy family at this ecological reserve.
- **Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes** (p88) Wander past the works of Europe's and Argentina's great artists.
- **Palacio Paz** (p82) Immerse yourself in the opulence of this French-style palace.
- **Feria de San Telmo** (p118) Hunt for collectibles at this bustling street market.

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Buenos Aires is a surprise to many travelers. Some come expecting a more ‘South American’ atmosphere, perhaps more ethnic-looking people or a less cosmopolitan feel. Or maybe they take BA’s nickname – the ‘Paris of South America’ – a little too literally and think it’s more European than it really is.

This is a unique city. It certainly has beautiful European-style architecture in many of its neighborhoods, but with rough edges that add an effortless casualness. There are impressive historical sights, cobbled colonial streets, shiny modern high-rises and unpretentious blue-collar neighborhoods. There are leafy parks, luxurious palaces, ethnic barrios and downtrodden shanty towns. Put simply, there’s something for everyone.

BA is a huge city, but most key attractions are clustered in just a handful of barrios. For the most part you can walk from one to another without too much trouble, and this is truly the best way to get to know the metropolis. Sure, there’s too much traffic, the air could be cleaner and most sidewalks have broken tiles, but there are few hills to puff up and a relaxing café, restaurant or ice-cream shop is always around the corner. And if you need to hop to the other side of town public transportation is cheap and plentiful.

The center is the bustling heart of Buenos Aires, buzzing frantically from dawn to dusk. This is where you’ll notice many awesome old European buildings, along with some not-quite-so-charming modern constructions. Florida is a pedestrian shopping street that always heaves with activity, and to the east are the docklands of Puerto Madero – a relatively new barrio that claims the capital’s most expensive real estate.

South of the center lies the charming neighborhood of San Telmo. The buildings here are less imposing and more colonial than in the city’s center, and narrow cobblestone streets add to its quaintness.

Further south of San Telmo is scrappy La Boca, the city’s most visually colorful neighborhood, where painted corrugated metal houses are often used as a symbol for BA.

West of the center is Congreso and Tribunales, the city’s legal quarters, which have plenty of impressive buildings along with an endearing, slightly run-down flavor.

Immediately to the north of the center is Retiro, with its fine plazas and gorgeous palaces. It’s mostly an upper-class neighborhood, though the city’s main train and bus stations are also located here, and they’re definitely not upscale. Northwest of Retiro lies swanky Recoleta, boasting an extensive Gothic cemetery that’s a must-see for any visitor. Recoleta is *the* place to eyeball BA’s upper classes, and harbors opulent cafés, restaurants and expensive boutiques.

Beyond Recoleta is the huge neighborhood of Palermo. Filled with extensive parklands and monumental statues, it’s a refuge for the middle class. Its sub-neighborhood Palermo Viejo is home to the trendiest eateries and most fashionable boutiques. Belgrano is even further north and mostly made up of residential streets that offer a haven for higher-class porteños.

Over to the west the more working-class barrios of Villa Crespo, Once, Caballito and Boedo are unpretentious, but sections of them are gentrifying fast. The capital’s main Jewish, Peruvian and Korean populations live around the Once area.

Note that on holidays, opening hours for the sights listed in this chapter tend to be similar to weekend hours. Some sights are closed on Monday, and while many offer tours these will usually be given in Spanish. For companies that organize bus, bike and walking tours see [p229](#).

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