

## SHOPPING

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# SHOPPING

Despite a global recession and a major drop in the purchasing power of the Argentine peso in the last few years, Buenos Aires' citizens continue to shop as if there's no tomorrow. Just a peek into the nearest mall on a weekend will make you wonder how people who seem to be making so little can spend so much. And it's not just an act of hedonistic consumerism; it's seen as a social pursuit that allows you to look good while you're doing it – after all, you never know who you're going to run into.

Shopping is often a family event, with many malls catering to children by offering special play areas and video arcades. Paseo Alcorta (p121) in Palermo has an especially large kids' playground on the 3rd floor, while Mercado de Abasto (p97) in Once sports an excellent children's museum and small amusement park complete with rides. Almost all modern malls also have multiplex cinemas and large food courts complete with fast-food outlets and ice-cream parlors. Some even offer health clubs, beauty shops and internet cafes.

If the thought of entering a shopping mall makes you want to run screaming in the other direction, stuff your pockets with pesos and head over to one of the city's wonderful outdoor street markets (p118). On sunny weekend afternoons, these promenades come alive with craft and antique stalls, tango dancers, street performances and vendors selling treats from fresh-squeezed orange juice to homemade empanadas.

Interested in design? Make a beeline for Palermo Soho, where avant-garde fashion designers' boutiques line the pretty tree-shaded streets. You'll find housewares emporiums and hip lingerie shops, young designer showcases, and impossibly cool cafes where beautiful women (often laden down with shopping bags) take a coffee break.

You'll pass through various other shopping districts, many centrally located in the city, without even trying. Downtown, Calle Florida is a must for any tourist, even if you're not looking to buy; it's a multipurpose pedestrian strip that buzzes with shoppers, tourists, performers and commuters. As a large avenue, Av Santa Fe is a bit less pedestrian-friendly, but equally prominent as the city's main service and shopping artery. San Telmo is *the* place for antiques, while Av Pueyrredón near Once train station is the place for cheap clothing. The largest concentration of jewelry shops is on Libertad south of Av Corrientes. For more on popular shopping strips, see p111.

A note before you hit the dressing room: clothing sizes correspond to the European system. Buenos Aires is an incredibly body-conscious city, and porteños also have lucky genes, so Argentine women are often slimmer than their counterparts in other Latin American countries (and visitors from the US, the UK, Europe and Australia). Clothing produced here reflects this fact, though larger sizes can be found in some of the bigger stores.

## OPENING HOURS

Store hours generally run from 9am or 10am to 8pm or 9pm weekdays, with many open for at least a few hours on Saturday. Most stores close on Sunday, unless they're located close to one of the street markets – shop owners can't pass up the kind of earning potential that comes with heavy pedestrian traffic.

## TAXES & REFUNDS

Taxes are included in quoted or marked prices: what you see is what you pay. Some places, however, might add a surcharge (or *recargo*) to credit card purchases – ask before you buy.

If you buy more than AR\$70 in merchandise from a store that displays a 'Tax Free Shopping' sticker, you're entitled to a tax refund. Just ask the merchant to make out an invoice for you (you'll need ID); upon leaving the country show the paperwork to a customs official, who'll stamp it and tell you where to obtain your refund. Give yourself some extra time at the airport for this transaction.

## BARGAINING

As in other Western countries, bargaining is not acceptable in stores. High-price items like jewelry and leather jackets can be