

INTRODUCING BUENOS AIRES



Painted facades near Museo Casa Carlos Gardel (p97) add to BA's colorful streetlife

Sexy, alive and supremely confident, this beautiful city gets under your skin. Like Europe with a melancholic twist, Buenos Aires is unforgettable.

Built by Europeans, this vibrant city overflows with energy and brims with attractive residents called porteños. The food is fresh and innovative, the shopping ranges from designer labels to street hawkers, and nightlife will keep you swinging all night long. Don't miss attending a superpassionate *fútbol* (soccer) game, snatching a quick tango lesson or downing a juicy steak – it's all top-drawer here. And despite a wobbly economy and pesky inflation (hey, it makes things exciting and we're all used to it by now), BA is *still* surprisingly affordable for anyone with hard currency.

Scratch beneath the surface and you'll find a wealth of old-world cafés, colonial architecture, outdoor markets and diverse communities, plus loads to intrigue and entertain. Rub shoulders with Recoleta's rich and famous while you visit its fascinating necropolis. Hunt for that antique gem in a dusty San Telmo shop, or visit the barrio's spectacularly popular weekend fair. Wander Boedo's bohemian streets, or take in a theatrical production around Av Corrientes. Rollerblade around Palermo's green parks with the Sunday crowd.

BA is elegant, old-world languor blended with contemporary slickness, whipped together into a unique and seductive city. Come and you'll understand why so many travelers are setting foot in this incredible place. More and more are loving it so much they've even decided to stay – you might be one of them.

BUENOS AIRES LIFE

Glistening humidity, sultry stares and that insanely sexy Spanish – you're in Buenos Aires now and sensuality drips down every corner. Sure, it's a bit of a stereotype, but there's some truth to every generalization.

Porteños are famous for their attractiveness; they are a proud people with a heightened sense of style and self-image. But don't be intimidated; beneath their glamorous exterior porteños are incredibly friendly and open – just dig around a little to get into their hearts.

Buenos Aires has two faces; it's a city that harbors both decline and prosperity. You'll see dirty, neglected buildings even in the bustling heart of the city – yet in certain pockets a definite rebirth has taken hold. Millions of dollars have been sunk into Puerto Madero, while Palermo Viejo's upscale restaurants fill up every weekend. Shopping streets are jammed with people, yet everyone complains about not being able to make ends meet. There's definitely a rich-getting-richer-and-poor-getting-poorer phenomenon going on, and unless you look beneath the surface you'll only be scraping the facade of truth.

Porteño confidence is always going up and down, but it's hardly out. The economic disaster of 2001 is a fading memory now, and consequent domestic investments (and huge exports) have paid off handsomely. The manufacturing industry has awakened with a vengeance, and along with a massive influx of foreign tourists has helped Argentina's economy reach red-hot status.

This city is rough, refined and being reborn all at once. The steaks are really that good, the night life is really that rockin', the economy is really that bad, the politicians are really that corrupt and life really does go on – even when everyone thinks they can't handle another pay cut. They'll grab a friend, head to an atmospheric café, do a little shopping, have dinner at an upscale restaurant and try to forget it all. Porteños are resilient people, and will survive whatever crisis is tossed their way; after all, they've been dealing with uncertainty all their lives. But most importantly, they'll look their damn best doing it.

'Buenos Aires has two faces; it's a city that harbors both decline and prosperity.'



Get friendly with all kinds of characters at the Feria Artesanal (p115) in Caminito, La Boca

THE AUTHORS

Sandra Bao



Sandra's mom and her family escaped China's communist regime in the years following WWII, eventually boarding a freighter bound for Argentina in 1952. After months at sea they arrived in Buenos Aires – just two

days after the death of Evita Perón. With the nation in mourning, their luggage wasn't processed for a week. Sandra's dad had a better welcome in 1955, when he came over from England, where he'd been studying.

Sandra's parents met in Montevideo, Uruguay, got married and moved to Olivos, Buenos Aires, where they raised two kids, Sandra and her brother Daniel. They lived the carefree porteño life (with *asados* every Sunday) until 1974, when things started to get politically dicey. Once again the Baos emigrated to greener pastures – this time the USA – and got into California real estate at just the right time.

Sandra is proud to be a porteña and has often returned to her homeland. As well as writing all of this guidebook (apart from the Background chapter) Sandra's also contributed to *Argentina* and *South America on a Shoestring*.

SANDRA'S TOP BUENOS AIRES DAY

It's Sunday morning, so like most other porteños I get up around noon – not bad for having stayed up till 5am the night before.

LONELY PLANET AUTHORS

Why is our travel information the best in the world? It's simple: our authors are independent, dedicated travelers. They don't research using just the internet or phone, and they don't take freebies, so you can rely on their advice being well researched and impartial. They travel widely, to all the popular spots and off the beaten track. They personally visit thousands of hotels, restaurants, cafés, bars, galleries, palaces, museums and more – and they take great pride in getting all the details right, and telling it how it is. Think you can do it? Find out how at lonelyplanet.com.

I nurse my hangover with *té negro* (black tea) and a couple of *medialunas* (croissants) at the local corner café, then deal with the crazy crowds bustling through San Telmo's antiques market. A refreshing walk sounds perfect on this glorious spring day, so I head over to the Reserva Ecológica Costanera Sur for some bird-watching. After my clearing dose of nature, a visit to Plaza de Mayo and its impressive Casa Rosada is in order. Strolling up Calle Florida means avoiding traffic, so this is what I do, window-shopping all the way (and grabbing a luscious ice-cream cone, too). When I reach the stunning Galerías Pacífico I pop inside for a quick peep at the gorgeous ceiling murals (and take a bathroom break downstairs). Plaza San Martín invites a restful sit-down and makes for some great people-watching on the grassy lawns. Then I head up Av Alvear into upscale Recoleta, where I wander the crafts stalls before ducking into the cemetery for some quiet reflection and awesome photo ops. After catching the 59 bus to Palermo Viejo I find the stores still open, and go on a shopping spree at clothing boutiques. Soon it's 10pm and time for dinner, so I meet some friends at one of the dozens of fine restaurants in this neighborhood – and start a long night out all over again.

Anja Mutić



It took one brief sojourn and a single tango class for Anja Mutić to fall in love with Buenos Aires. After visiting several South American destinations for work and play, she kept returning to BA, lured by its fresh evening breezes, cozy cafés, underground theater and late-night *milongas*. She continues to tango in various cities around the world. Anja wrote the Background chapter.

GETTING STARTED

Buenos Aires is a cosmopolitan city, and you can expect to find pretty much all the modern conveniences and services you're used to. There's a plethora of accommodations in nearly all neighborhoods that are popular with tourists, and they range from countless hostels to five-star hotels such as the Hilton, Four Seasons and Sofitel. There are also dozens of lovely guesthouses to choose from, including several gay-friendly options. It's always a good idea to reserve ahead of time – and pretty much mandatory during the busier November to March and July to August seasons. At other times there are usually a few rooms available at all but the most popular places. That said, don't come to BA during major holidays such as Christmas or Easter without reservations.

BA eateries cater to all budgets – you can nab a *choripán* (spicy sausage sandwich) for AR\$3, or pay international prices at the most expensive restaurants. As a whole, Argentine cuisine isn't hugely creative – typical fare consists of steak or pasta. Buenos Aires, however, has a fairly good range of (pricier) exotic cuisines, especially in its Palermo Viejo neighborhood.

Most traveler services are easily found in the center, including internet cafés, telephone offices and laundries. It's easy to get from one area to another using the Subte, buses or taxis. Many people speak some English, especially those in the tourist sectors.

WHEN TO GO

In terms of weather, spring (September to November) and fall (March to May) are the best seasons to visit Buenos Aires. Also, most festivals take place during these months, as do a good chunk of sporting events. Winter can be cold but not freezing, and a fine time to visit the city's theaters, museums and cafés.

Many tourists come during the late spring and summer (November to March), though the hottest months of January and February are usually unpleasantly humid. Porteños who can afford it leave the city for the coasts, so some places – like museums and entertainment venues – close down in the capital (Janu-

ary and February are also the worst months to be doing business here). However, no matter what time of year you visit, BA will have something exciting to offer.

FESTIVALS

There are festivals happening in Buenos Aires all the time, and they celebrate nearly everything – tango, horses, gauchos, cinema, art, wine, fashion and books. Spring is when the lion's share of these events occur.

Check with tourist offices (p225) for exact dates as some vary from year to year; they can also tell you of other goings-on. See p220 for a list of national holidays.

ADVANCE PLANNING

Buenos Aires has become a very popular destination, so book your hotel in advance to ensure a roof above your head. In fancier hotels you'll also save a few bucks off those outrageous rack rates.

Most restaurants don't require advance reservations, but if you want to eat at a popular place (especially on week-ends) then be sure to call ahead. We note in individual reviews whether reservations are recommended at a particular place; in general, the fancier a restaurant the more likely you'll need a reservation.

Some websites can help you plan ahead and catch special events: Visit www.whatsupbuenosaires.com for hip music happenings, or www.bue.gov.ar for general information and upcoming events. To find reviewed restaurants see www.saltshaker.net and click on the restaurants link under categories.

If you're a do-it-yourselfer with an MP3 player and don't need a tour guide but would still appreciate some guidance, check out www.MPTours.com. You can download unique self-guided tours and maps of BA neighborhoods for US\$19.99 each, walking, stopping and listening at your leisure. The city (www.bue.gov.ar/audioguia; both in English and Spanish) also has free downloads.

Finally, try to pack some smart clothing in your bag. Porteños are a well-dressed and well-groomed lot, and you'll definitely stick out as a tourist in loud shirt, shorts and flip-flops (in fact, porteños hardly ever wear shorts at all unless they're working out). Especially if you're going out at night, dress to impress – everyone else will.

February

CARNAVAL

Usually occurring in February, Buenos Aires' Carnival is a tiny affair compared to Rio's or Bahia's, but there's still a chance to be clobbered by water balloons and canned foam. This is a great time to catch some Brazilian-flavored *murga* groups (traditional Carnival ensembles), with dancing and drumming around Plaza de Mayo. If you want something with more oomph, head to Guaqueguaychú in Entre Ríos province. Montevideo (p207) in Uruguay also has a good Carnival. Future dates are February 24, 2009; February 16, 2010; March 8, 2011.

CHINESE NEW YEAR

Yes, Buenos Aires has a Chinatown, but blink and you'll miss it. Check it out in Belgrano on Arribeños (p100); it's only about four blocks long and fairly tame as far as big-city Chinatowns go, but New Year's is a lively time and worth heading up here for food, firecrackers and festivities. Dates depend on the lunar calendar; it'll be on January 26 in 2009, February 14 in 2010, and February 3 in 2011.

March

FASHION BA

Buenos Aires' fashion-design scene has skyrocketed in the past years, and these four days of clothing stalls and catwalk show off the city's latest threads and their makers. It takes place at Palermo's La Rural in March (fall collection) and late August or early September (spring collection). Plenty of models and other beautiful people of BA attend – bring out the voyeur in yourself.

April

FERIA DEL LIBRO

www.el-libro.com.ar

Buenos Aires' annual book fair attracts more than a million book lovers for three weeks in April and May, featuring famous authors doing readings and signing books. Most exhibitors come from Latin America, but there are also displays from countries like England, China, France, Ukraine, Norway and Armenia. Look for it at the La Rural building in Palermo.

FESTIVAL INTERNACIONAL DE CINE INDEPENDIENTE

www.bafici.gov.ar

This mid-to-late-April independent film festival highlights both national and international independent films, with awards given out in separate categories; guest directors and actors are invited. Hundreds of films are screened in the city's cinemas, with a main venue being the Abasto shopping mall (p97).

May

ARTE BA

www.arteba.com

This exciting event in mid-May features exhibitions from hundreds of art galleries, dealers, institutions and organizations in Buenos Aires, with both national and international contemporary art on display. Conferences, presentations and discussions make the rounds, and young new artists get key exposure. It takes place at Palermo's La Rural building.

June

DÍA DE LA MUERTE DE CARLOS GARDEL

June 24 marks the anniversary of Gardel's death in a plane crash in Medellín, Colombia. Numerous tango events during the week conclude with a small pilgrimage to the singer's tomb in the Cementerio de la Chacarita (see boxed text p88), where thousands of the singer's fans crowd the streets and leave him flowers. Gardel's birthday on December 11 sees similar festivities.

July

LA RURAL

www.ruralarg.org.ar

This is the mother of all livestock fairs, where prize cows, sheep, goats, horses and – most especially – bulls, all strut their stuff. Agricultural machinery is also highlighted, and gaucho shows provide entertainment. It takes place in late July to early August at Palermo's La Rural building.

August

FESTIVAL DE TANGO

www.festivaldetango.com.ar

Occurring in mid-August, this week-long tango festival is spread out all over the city

and offers a great way to see some of the country's best tango dancers and musicians do their thing. A week later is the **Mundial de Tango** (www.mundialdetango.gov.ar), where international couples compete fiercely for this most prestigious trophy – the world's best tango dancers. It also takes place in venues around the city.

September

FERIA DE ANTICUARIOS

www.feriadeanticuarios.org

Those big on antiques shouldn't miss this extravaganza, which takes place from early to mid-September at the Palais de Glace (p89). The best antique pieces in Buenos Aires are exhibited and are up for sale, but don't expect any bargains; prices are in the thousands of US dollars.

VINOS Y BODEGAS

www.expovinosybodegas.com.ar

A can't-miss event for wine aficionados, with vintages from around 100 Argentine *bodegas* (wineries) on tap. Mix with thousands of sommeliers, restaurateurs, journalists and general wine-lovers at Palermo's La Rural building. Occurs in mid-September; most of the wines at this event are from Argentina's famous Mendoza region.

LA SEMANA DEL ARTE EN BUENOS AIRES

www.lasemanadelarte.com.ar

In late September dozens of cultural centers, museums and art galleries all over BA open their doors for a mega-event that highlights some of the best contemporary artists in the country. Media include everything from etchings to photographs to paintings, while conferences, concerts and cinema also come with the package. The week-long event ends with *La Noche de los Museos* (www.lanochedelosmuseos.com.ar), when over a hundred museums and galleries open their doors for free till 2am; there are guided tours, special shows and even a shuttle bus that whisks visitors between the venues.

CASA FOA

www.casafoa.com

This is the city's top-notch architecture, design and decoration fair, which runs from September to November. Each year a different dilapidated location is picked and

rehabbed into an amazing venue; in 2007 this was an old train station in Palermo Viejo.

October

SOUTH AMERICAN MUSIC CONFERENCE

www.samc.net

Started in 2004, this premier event solidifies Buenos Aires as the capital of Latin American electronic music. During the day conferences and workshops bring together industry artists and producers, while at night 50,000 bashers dance to some of the best national and international DJs around.

MARATÓN DE BUENOS AIRES

www.maratondebuenosaires.com

In October long-distance runners can go the whole 42km, passing many of BA's famous landmarks and neighborhoods along the way. There are 8km and 4km options also; the Obelisco (p71) marks the start and finish line. The 2007 winners for the full marathon were Juan Carlos Cardona (2:16:06) and Sirlene Souza (2:39:07).

November

GRAN PREMIO NACIONAL

In mid-November the country's biggest horse race takes place in Palermo's opulent and French-styled hipódromo (p173). First held in 1884, this is a fine event that not only attracts the well-to-do and celebrity-watchers, but regular families as well. Watch for the *granaderos* (presidential horseback guards) in their impressive outfits, marching around for the crowds.

CREAMFIELDS

www.creamfieldsba.com

BA's answer to the UK's outdoor, all-night, cutting-edge electronic music and dance party, Creamfields features nearly a hundred international DJs and bands. Expect tens of thousands of ravers swinging to the likes of Hernán Cattaneo (Argentina's most famous DJ). In 2007 the headliner was the Chemical Brothers.

MARCHA DEL ORGULLO GAY

www.marchadelorgullo.org.ar

It's nothing like San Francisco's or Sydney's, but BA has its own gay pride march. Each

year on the first Saturday in November, thousands of BA's gays, lesbians, transgenders and more strut their way from Plaza de Mayo to the Congreso. They use this high-profile event to promote their rights, and each year the colorful party gets bigger – the march was first held in 1992. Gay Pride Week follows later in November.

DÍA DE LA TRADICIÓN

This is the closest thing to traditional gaucho culture you'll probably witness, with folk music and dancing, traditional foods and feats of horsemanship. The best place to be during these mid-November festivities is San Antonio de Areco (p202), Argentina's ground zero for gauchos and a day trip away from BA. If you can't get away, head to the Feria de Mataderos (p115), way west of center in the barrio of Mataderos.

December

CAMPEONATO ABIERTO ARGENTINO DE POLO

Argentina boasts the world's best polo (see p174), and the Abierto is the world's premier polo event. This series of matches also marks the culmination of the spring polo season. It takes place at Palermo's Campo Argentino de Polo. For exact dates and details, contact the [Asociación Argentina de Polo](http://www.aapolo.com) (☎ 4343-0972; www.aapolo.com).

CAMPEONATO ABIERTO ARGENTINO DE PATO

Steeped in gaucho culture, *pato* (see p174) is still not quite the national sport of Argentina it claims to be. A six-handled, leather-covered ball (originally a dead duck) is the center of attention. Don't miss this spectacle; it's cool and quirky as hell. For details, contact the [Federación Argentina de Pato](http://www.fedpato.com.ar) (www.fedpato.com.ar).

FESTIVAL BUENOS AIRES DANZA CONTEMPORÁNEA

www.buenosairesdanza.com.ar

Every even-numbered year this two-week flurry showcases the contemporary dance scene. About 20 dance companies participate, including the Ballet Contemporáneo del Teatro San Martín. Performances, seminars and workshops take place in the city's cultural centers and theaters.

HOW MUCH?

- Cup of coffee AR\$4
- Glass of chopp (draft beer) AR\$8
- Empanada (meat pie) AR\$2
- Steak dinner AR\$25
- Average taxi ride AR\$15
- Liter of gasoline AR\$2
- 1.5L bottle of water AR\$3
- Souvenir T-shirt AR\$30
- Movie ticket AR\$15
- Cheapest opera ticket at the Teatro Colón AR\$30

COSTS

Until 2002 Argentina was a very expensive country – on par with the United States or Europe. After the peso was unpegged from the US dollar, however, it dropped into a roller-coaster ride that finally settled at three to one, where it remains today. It's always wise to check what that pesky peso is doing (see www.xc.com), as Argentina is an economically volatile country and things could change quickly.

Despite a steep rise in inflation the past few years, Buenos Aires remains a bargain for visitors with hard currency. Dorm beds can be had for US\$12, and cheap hotel rooms go for around US\$40. Three-star hotels are US\$75, and if you book online you might be able find a five-star one for under US\$200.

Dinners at upscale restaurants, including appetizer, main course and drinks, often cost under US\$20; lunches are cheaper, especially when you order the *menu ejecutivo* (set lunch). Bus or Subte tickets are US\$0.30 and short taxi rides under US\$6. Entry to museums, theaters, nightclubs and special events is just a few bucks – even if you sometimes pay three times more as a 'nonresident.' You could spend US\$100 per day and be very comfortable. From your bank account's standpoint, this is an *excellent* time to be in Buenos Aires.

INTERNET RESOURCES

The following are just a sampling of websites devoted to Buenos Aires; all are in English or have an English link:

www.baexpats.com & www.bainnewcomers.org

Popular expat websites.

© Lonely Planet Publications

www.bainnewcomers.org Another expat website.

www.baires.elsur.org Good photos and interesting historical topics.

www.bue.gov.ar The city's official website.

www.buenosaires.en.craigslist.org Find an apartment, a job and/or a lover.

www.buenosairesherald.com The *Buenos Aires Herald's* view of the country and the world, in English.

www.buenostours.com BA from a foreign tour guide's perspective.

www.hostels.com/ar.html Lists many Hostelling International and non-HI affiliated hostels; includes information on how to reserve in advance.

www.lanic.utexas.edu/la/argentina A massive list of Argentine websites – if you can't find it here...well, never mind, 'cause you'll find it here.

www.lonelyplanet.com This site has forums, travel news, recent updates, postcards from other travelers and lots more.

www.saltshaker.net Best for its detailed restaurant reviews.

www.thegayguide.com.ar All things gay in BA.

www.whatsupbuenosaires.com Current happenings, especially for music.

wwwn.cdc.gov/travel/destinationArgentina.aspx The US Centers for Disease Control's health information site for Argentina.

© Lonely Planet Publications. To make it easier for you to use, access to this chapter is not digitally restricted. In return, we think it's fair to ask you to use it for personal, non-commercial purposes only. In other words, please don't upload this chapter to a peer-to-peer site, mass email it to everyone you know, or resell it. See the terms and conditions on our site for a longer way of saying the above - 'Do the right thing with our content.'