

36 Hours in Buenos Aires



Diego Giudice for The New York Times

From Culture to Cuisine in Buenos Aires: Take a tour of Argentina's capital city.

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Sure you can have a tango-filled, steak-fueled weekend in Buenos Aires. But Argentina's capital and largest city also has a much more contemporary side that has been emerging from its traditional roots and European influences for years now. Blame it on a creative class of Porteños, as the locals are known, who have turned the Latin metropolis into a vibrant, cosmopolitan community. And it's a movement that keeps evolving. From hidden supper clubs to bankrolled art galleries to buzzing boutiques, the sprawling city is a study of sophistication on the rise. But that doesn't mean you should bypass the old timey cafes and parrillas. Partly what makes the city so irresistibly alive right now is its checkered past peeking through its new personality.

Mapping the City



Lodging

The **Ultra Hotel** (Gorriti 4929; hotelultra.com) is one of the many affordable boutiques popping up in Palermo. The 20 guest rooms border on sparse but the rooftop pool, library, courtyard, restaurant and lobby provide plenty of lounging space. Rates start at \$110.

FRIDAY

4 p.m.

1. National Ghosts

Jump right into the city's history at the famous Recoleta Cemetery. You'll join stray cats and roaming tourists who drift among the more than 6,400 aboveground mausoleums. Their mishmash of styles from Art Nouveau to neo-Gothic reflect the different eras in which the moneyed classes were buried. The cemetery, covering four city blocks, became the final resting place for presidents and generals, poets and businessmen. It's also a remarkably pretty and peaceful parcel of land. That is, until you discover the glossy black Duarte Family crypt, where Eva Perón, or Evita, was buried and where crowds appear like ghosts to flash cameras and lay flowers in respect for Argentina's former "Spiritual Leader of the Nation."

6 p.m.

2. Evening Aperitivo

You can mark the end of the day by the traffic in the streets — and the number of Porteños sitting at cafes. Aperitivo, a casual evening drink, is a popular pastime, and one of the city's oldest cafes, La Biela, is just a stone's throw from the famed necropolis. Join the suave men with white hair and pressed suits inside the sweeping corner space, lined with warm wood and decorated with framed photos and artifacts that illustrate its long affiliation with racecar driving. Or opt for a plastic chair on the sprawling terrace. Either way, you'll be joining a 150-year lineage of patrons who have included politicians, actors, artists and writers, including Jorge Luis Borges, who lived just down the street. To give your evening extra kick, order coffee with liqueur and cream, from about 60 to 80 Argentine pesos, or \$11 to \$14.50 at 5.50 pesos to the dollar.

9:30 p.m.

3. Insider Dining

By dinnertime you'll feel right at home in Buenos Aires — at least if you reserve a spot at Casa Felix, the private supper club in the airy home of Diego Felix and Sanra Ritten. The couple — he's Argentine, she's from San Diego — were on the forefront of the city's private restaurant trend when they opened their doors in the quiet, tree-lined residential Chacarita neighborhood in 2007. Since then, they've become one of the most popular dining spots in town, serving a five-course, Latin American-inspired, pescatarian meal in their home three nights a week (one night a week during the Argentine winter months). At the start of the night, a mix of tourists, expats and locals bond in the backyard garden over welcome drinks, concocted with local pisco, and hors d'oeuvres inspired by ingredients that come right from the garden, like fontina wrapped in chayote leaves. The fanciful preparations and bright flavors of the meal that follow in the couple's courtyard — from creamy homemade burrata to a filet of Patagonian anchovy to a sinfully rich chocolate and Aguaribay marquise — deserve the fanfare they elicit. The prix fixe meal is 245 pesos per person, wine not included.

SATURDAY

10 a.m.

4. Sweet Fuel

Outside the stunning National Museum of Decorative Arts is a quaint two-story gatehouse: once part of the ambassadorial residence, it is now home to Croque Madame, a peaceful spot for a morning café con leche (24 pesos). Find a table in the manicured garden where you'll be shaded beneath towering trees and soothed by the sound of trickling fountains. Since it's too early to order one of the gut-busting signature croques, order homemade scones, made each morning and served warm (30 pesos), to accompany your sweet coffee.

11 a.m.

5. Art Crawl

Since you're right there, pop inside the neo-Classical National Museum of Decorative Arts (entrance is 15 pesos), which was built by the French architect René Sergent for Matías Errazúriz and Josefina de Alvear. The high-society couple — he was an ambassador to France — commissioned the mansion in the early 20th century and furnished it with French and Flemish furniture and tapestries, Oriental porcelain and paintings by the likes of El Greco and Manet. When Josefina died in 1935, her husband turned it over to the Argentine government on one condition: that it become a museum. More than seven decades later, you can stroll through the family's virtually unchanged rooms. From there, venture past the grand current ambassadorial homes to Avenida Figueroa Alcorta and compare the "new Buenos Aires" at the Malba, the Latin American Art Museum of

Buenos Aires (40 pesos). Though small, the sleek modern cultural center makes a big statement with its 20th-century works from notable Latin artists like Fernando Botero and Diego Rivera, along with international exhibitions like Tracey Emin and Yayoi Kusama.

3 p.m.

6. Gourmet Scandinavian

The neighborhood known as Palermo Hollywood — owing to the number of film and commercial production companies populating the area's warehouses — used to be a no man's land. But when the restaurant Olsen opened there in 2001, it changed everything. An instant hit with the fashion set, 12 years later, it still buzzes morning, noon and night — and at no other time more than brunch. Whether seated in the minimalist interior beneath soaring ceilings or outdoors along the ivy-covered wall, you can enjoy such Scandinavian dishes as whitefish, smoked salmon, potato pancakes. Brunch for two, 250 pesos.

4:30 p.m.

7. Style Central

Street style in Buenos Aires remains classically sophisticated, but in Palermo Soho, the colors are bright, the designs are funky and the energy is infectious. A hotbed of indie fashion designers along with Argentina's established brands, the neighborhood, which came into its own after the 2001 financial crisis, is the perfect place to find souvenirs, from high-quality leather shoes to artisanal paper. Graffiti art and leafy trees create colorful canopies along the cobblestone streets, which, along with in-store D.J.'s, outdoor cafes and youthful crowds, make shopping feel like a party.

10 p.m.

8. Food as Art

Along one of Palermo Hollywood's rapidly changing streets is a graffitied facade with only a small sign on the black door: Tegui, one of the most exciting restaurants in Buenos Aires. The jewel box of a dining room has three focal points: a wall of glassed-in wine bottles at the front, a palm-shaded smoking atrium in the middle, and the open kitchen in the rear. From end to end, a fleet of movie-star-handsome waiters in white jackets glide, delivering dishes that are as notable for their pairings as their presentation: scallops with green apple and coconut foam; rabbit ravioli with peaches; Chilean sea bass served with an octopus Bolognese sauce. A three-course dinner for two, about 700 pesos, without wine.

12 a.m.

9. Midnight Toast

Just as Porteños dine late, they stay out even later, and the fancy boîte, Isabel, isn't too far away. Here, you'll discover a classic Art Deco interior — plush velvet sofas, mahogany tables, herringbone wood floors — that's tricked out with a long mirrored bar and bulbous overhead lamps that pulse to the sound of the D.J. Just don't get too distracted that you forget to order your martini or champagne cocktail (75 pesos) before last call at 3:15 a.m.

SUNDAY

10 a.m.

10. Green Scene

Buenos Aires is a verdant city. Towering plane trees make tunnels out of the avenues, bougainvillea blooms up the sides of homes, and parks ranging from scruffy to splendid are everywhere. But none are as wild as the Costanera Sur Ecological Reserve, an 865-acre swath of marshland along the Río de la Plata. Follow the path from the park's southern entrance and you'll soon be surrounded by reeds poking out from ponds, egrets and swans, and green parrots squawking overhead. Grab lunch afterward at one of the streetside parrillas on the bordering Avenida Tristán Achával. While you enjoy your choripán — grilled chorizo on a roll — you can watch fit Porteños jogging, in-line skating and bicycling up and down the promenade.

1 p.m.

11. High Notes

End your visit with one last dose of culture. The city's opera house, Teatro Colón, welcomes groups of up to 30 people into its storied halls every 15 minutes, seven days a week (110 pesos). Considered one of the best concert halls in the world, Teatro Colón has hosted world-renowned conductors, opera singers and ballet dancers in its 105-year history, and its interior befits such grandeur. The tour takes you through the sweeping entry hall, where costumes from past performances are displayed in glass cases, through the Golden Room, which is reminiscent of Versailles' Hall of Mirrors, and finally inside the concert hall where, if you're lucky, a musician or two will be rehearsing on stage.

THE DETAILS

1. Recoleta Cemetery, Plaza Francesca

2. La Biela, Avenida Quintana 600, (54-11) 4804-0449; labiela.com

3. Casa Felix, colectivofelix.com

4. Croque Madame, Avenida Libertador 1902, (54-11) 4806-8639; croquemadame.com.ar

5. National Museum of Decorative Arts, Avenida Libertador 1902, (54-11) 4801-8248; mnad.org **Malba**, Avenida Figueroa Alcorta 3415, (54-11) 4808-6500; malba.org.ar

6. Olsen, Gorriti 5870, (54-11) 4776-7677

7. Palermo Soho

8. Tegui, Costa Rica 5852, (54-11) 5291-3333; tegui.com.ar

9. Isabel, Uriarte 1664, (54-11) 4834-6969; isabelbar.com

10. Costanera Sur Ecological Reserve, Avenida Tristán Achával Rodríguez 1550; (54-11) 4315-4129

11. Teatro Colón, Tucumán 1171; teatrocolon.org.ar

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http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/15/travel/36-hours-in-buenos-aires.html?_r=0&pagewanted=all