

Buenos Aires hums with cultural riches, culinary pleasures

JANE MUNDY

Talk to just about any local porteño — a person of the port — and you'll soon hear that Buenos Aires is the best city in the world. And no wonder: Thanks to a diverse cultural heritage with stunning architecture surrounded by vast green spaces, a thriving art scene, superb cuisine and wine, there's something for everyone.

With its wide, tree-lined avenues flanked with ornate European buildings housing so many sidewalk cafes, Buenos Aires is nicknamed The Paris of South America.

In the early 20th century Argentina was one of the wealthiest cities in the world, and European architects, artists, intellectuals and others who immigrated here created a multicultural environment filled with culture and art, which thrives today. Right away you feel the city's creativity — it's palpable.

After checking into my stellar garden suite at Home Hotel in Palermo (complete with private wading pool, upstairs sun deck surrounded by greenery, vinyl record player and artsy coffee table books), Yamila Giserman with Destino Argentina Tourism and I visited the Evita Museum — fittingly on International Women's Day. Yamila told me that young women identify with Evita. She pushed for women's suffrage, obtained in 1947, and the museum was once a home for destitute single mothers that Eva Duarte founded. Here is much of Evita's heritage, including her famous dresses and a photograph of her kicking a soccer ball — in high heels.

Yamila also told me that 10 years ago you were crazy to cycle here. Now bikes are free for the first hour and bike lanes abound. Many people take advantage of parks with "healthy stations" and clusters of athletic bodies exercising in so much green space is phenomenal. Gyms are prolific, women carry yoga mats everywhere and I've never seen so many dog walkers.

Restaurants and bars carry pet-friendly "su mascota es bienvenida" signs. Billboards remind you to pick up after pooch but that's another similarity with Paris, not everyone does.

Cabbies blast through intersections with nerves of steel, no such thing as taking turns. Interestingly, there seem to be as many mechanics as there are cafes on urban streets. And not getting ripped off by taxi drivers is a goal for both porteños and tourists.

The subway is also a good way to get around, but Buenos Aires has the typical Latin American big city challenges: Yamila warned me to beware bag snatchers and pickpockets — wear your backpack in front and don't place your phone on an outdoor café table.

You could spend weeks visiting

hundreds of art galleries, museums, cultural centres, and theatres. With a population of around 2.8 million, Buenos Aires has at least 734 bookstores. El Ateneo Grand Splendid, built as a theatre in 1919 and arguably the world's most beautiful and famous bookshop, was packed with people — including teenagers — reading books in elegant theatre boxes.

Everywhere is a colour-explosion of street art, and artists can legally paint these amazing murals (check out the street art tours). In October and November streets become purple tunnels of huge jacaranda trees. A must is the MALBA museum with its incredible collection of Latin American works such as Frida Kahlo, Xul Solar and Fernando Botero.

If you like joining in (think "hands up, baby hands up" Club Med style) and wearing funny hats, go for the Argentine experience. Besides making your own empanadas, you learn the basics of being an Argentine, and the wine flows freely.

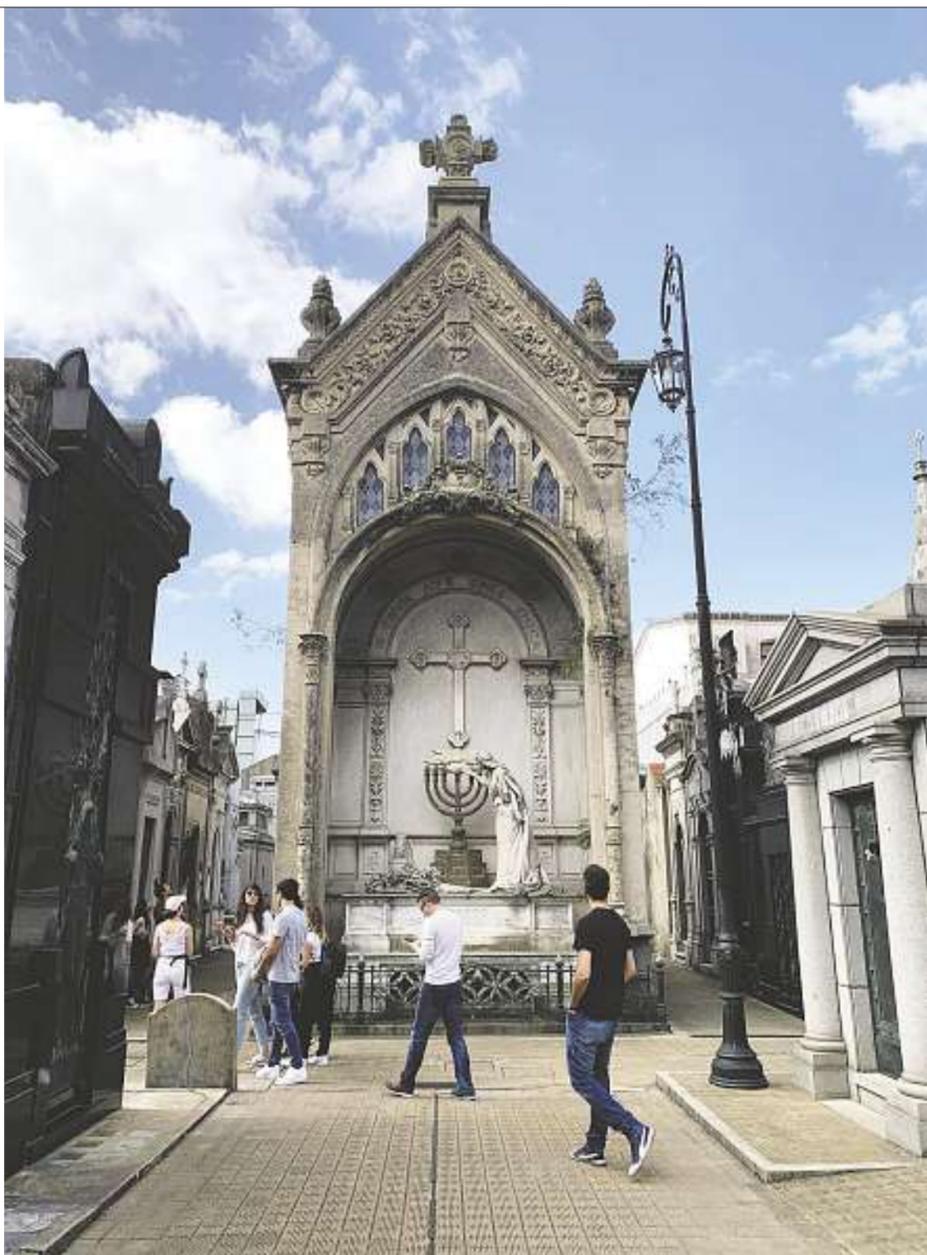
I (temporarily) converted to carnivore over a splendid three-hour lunch at La Cabrera, with heaving platters of Wagyu and Angus beef (Argentine meat is superb, mainly because they range on pampas grass), chimichurri sauce and grilled veggies, and of course a bottle of Malbec. Service was flawless and our server tossed coleslaw tableside from a cocktail shaker. It's a bit pricier than some restaurants (US\$40 per person) where lunch averages about \$35 including wine.

There are many intriguing neighbourhoods to explore, and the best way to see them is the On-Off bus. We passed houses in various stages of decaying splendour smack up against polished steel and glass skyscrapers. Riots of colour — turquoise, red and yellow — are splashed on corrugated steel storefronts. Some passengers got off to join throngs of fans at La Bombonera, the yellow and blue football stadium. The Boca neighbourhood was once the centre of immigrant life, particularly for Italians.

And Italian architecture is best seen and experienced with a tour of Palacio Barolo.

After rubbing the bronze condor in the lobby for good luck, we took the elevator to the 22nd floor and climbed the last two floors up steps so narrow my size 7 shoe barely fit. The panoramic view of the city — including all the important buildings and an apartment block that houses prostitutes and their families with clothes hanging from almost every balcony — is worth the climb.

The middle-class Palermo district has recently gone upscale. Hipsters fill swanky restaurants and cafes that spill onto sidewalks; shops feature indie designers and small boutique hotels (no high-rises) like Home Hotel, where I stayed,



Strolling the little streets of Cementerio de la Recoleta. JANE MUNDY



Plaza De Mayo is the main city square in Buenos Aires. GETTY IMAGES

are perfectly located in this pedestrian and bike friendly 'hood.

Recoleta is filled with aristocratic splendour, from gardens and residences to historical monuments. Here is the Cementerio de la Recoleta, aptly described as a macabre scaled-down Disney Village. You walk its little "streets" that house Argentina's rich and famous remains, including Evita. It's the most expensive real estate

in Argentina. Across the road I stopped for an aperitif and a nod to Jorge Luis Borges at La Biela.

All neighbourhoods have similarities: restaurants are filled with diners at 11 p.m., (they sleep in) and shops stay open past midnight.

Unfortunately I didn't get into that groove — fell asleep and missed the dinner tango show at Rojo Tango. Fortunately, I watched talented tango buskers in the park before

IF YOU GO

Air Canada's 787 Dreamliner flies from Vancouver to Buenos Aires via Toronto. There is a noticeable difference with the aircraft's lower cabin pressure. Even in economy I managed to get some shut-eye and I didn't land with my usual red eyes and headache.

checking into the opulent Palacio Duhau for my last night and a splendid dinner on the balcony at the civilized hour of 8 p.m. The neoclassical architecture of this grand mansion makes this Park Hyatt a unique landmark and I would have loved to luxuriate longer.

The writer was a guest of Destino Argentina, which neither approved nor read this article before publication.

We manage the details so you can make memories.



Senior Discovery Tours takes care of every detail, so all you have to do is enjoy the world. Unlike many tour operators, we include everything: flights, airport transfers, excursions, accommodations, most meals, tipping, taxes, and travel insurance. We'll even pick you up and drop you off at home in most Canadian cities. Call us today.

BARCELONA & CATALONIA

14 Days • Departs September 20

Value-packed tour to Barcelona, Monserrat, Girona, Costa Brava and Tarragona. Includes Air Canada Rouge flights, First Class hotels and breakfast and dinner (with wine) daily.

\$5487 p.p. double

Senior Discovery tours
Travel made easy

Reg # 2160711

1.800.268.3492 PROUDLY CANADIAN FOR 40 YEARS SeniorDiscoveryTours.ca

Travel in Luxury to India

EXPLORE INDIA SMALL GROUP ESCORTED TOURS

SAVE UP TO \$1,200
BOOK BY MAY 31

- International roundtrip airfare
- Escorted transfers from airport-hotel-airport
- Meals, guided tours, entrances, wildlife safaris
- Accommodation in 5 star hotels and resorts

- Air Conditioned Volvo coach transportation with room facility
- Services of an accompanying Explore India tour director

10 Day – The Magical India

Delhi, Agra, Ranthambore & Jaipur

Multiple Departure Dates 2019-2020

W/ AIR* Save up to \$600 FROM \$3,099 **\$2,799 CAD**

15 Day - Impressions of India

Delhi, Jaipur, Ranthambore, Agra, Khajurao & Varanasi

Multiple Departure Dates 2019-2020

W/ AIR* Save up to \$800 FROM \$4,799 **\$4,399 CAD**

16 DAY – Jewels of South India

Chennai, Mahabalipuram, Pondicherry, Tanjore, Chettinad, Madurai, Munnar, Periyar, Backwaters & Cochin

Multiple Departure Dates 2019-2020

W/ AIR* Save up to \$1,200 FROM \$6,999 **\$5,799 CAD**

18 Day - Luxury - The Camel Fair & Sacred Ganges

Delhi, Udaipur, Pushkar, Jaipur, Ranthambore, Agra & Varanasi

Multiple Departure Dates 2019-2020

W/ AIR* Save up to \$600 FROM \$7,799 **\$7,499 CAD**

GUARANTEE BEST PRICE! BOOK NOW!

ExploreIndia **LIMITED INVENTORY! CALL US TODAY**
1-800-515-3808 www.exploreindia.ca

*Includes Air from Vancouver and Toronto. Fares in CAD, per person, based on double occupancy in a hotel. **Savings are per couple and included in advertised price. Government taxes, fees and gratuities are extra. Additional fees apply to Single supplement. Advertisements apply to Magical India Tour Sep 17, 2019 only. All tours are subject to availability. All rates are subject to change & availability at time of booking. The cost of the insurance is included in the price of the tour for Impressions of India, and the price cannot be reduced for those who reside where coverage is not available or who are not medically able to travel. Emergency medical coverage is available at additional cost. Travel insurance included is not available to residents of Quebec and Washington State, New York State, USA. Explore India Journeys Inc. reserve the right to correct errors and omissions. BPCPA #73057