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The Heart of Argentina

The pulse of a continent rages...from the steamy north to the pristine south...

“Two hearts beating, drawn together as one... strangers, with eyes caressing the night in rhythmic bursts... passion and danger... heroes and lovers. The smoky madness of a Buenos Aires café beckons, teeth clenched upon that single rose. Eyes wide open, wondering what lies ahead.”

Such is the scorching dance known as the Tango... but much the same could be said for its birthplace... the exhilarating Argentina.

On the Southeastern quadrant of the South American continent lies the country of Evita's birth. Atlantic coastline and Herculean mountains, steamy rain forests and expansive plains, sub-arctic solitude and urban bustle are all part of the package. Bordered by six adjoining Latin nations, what other country could you find not only the sultry Buenos Aires and its' Parisien flair, but also the world's most perfect glaciers just a few stone skips from the doorway of the Antarctic? The eighth largest country in the world, Argentina stretches almost 5,000 kilometres north to south.

A Colourful History

From an historical perspective, Argentina's peoples have been here for the past 13,000 years. Right around the 16th century, though the Europeans arrived, bringing with them varying forms of government, modern ways, disease and the inevitable claims of territory... this not only in Argentina but also neighbouring Uruguay, Paraguay, Chile and Bolivia. From the 18th century on, debates (and wars) have raged regarding how things should be run and who should be doing the running. Once Spain came under the wing of France's Napoleon, however, it generated an over-riding need for independence from the motherland and by 1816, Argentina threw a few punches, scraped the dust off and proclaimed to be its' own country. Since that declaration, there have been endless internal confrontations that have overshadowed periods of extreme wealth and impoverishment... a circle of self destruction that lasted up until 1983, when democracy finally took hold and the country began to walk a calmer path. Prosperity has been steady and though a 2001 economic crash threw a monkey wrench into the plans, Argentina appears to have righted the ship again.

Getting There

The prospect of flying almost 10,000 kilometres is a daunting one and even the swankiest of air travel experiences are tempered by the presence of large airport terminals, scowling customs agents and security measures that dampen the spirit. Toss in the elbow-throwing crowds and the endless wait for the maybe-yes, maybe-no baggage and we're left in a quivering heap.

A solution, we have.

Sunwest Aviation, based out of Calgary just may be that lifeline to ensure the absolutely perfect vacation experience. The words PRIVATE



JET ring loud and clear on this option and though you certainly pay royally for the luxury of your own long haul aircraft, it will be a travel experience unlike any you have ever had before. Commercial air travel?... Nah, done that.

For starters, there is no large, ominous airport to trek through. Private jet travel is conducted on a much more personal level. Upon arriving at the flight centre, you park your vehicle and the friendly folks there care and feed it until you are reunited. Check-in is a snap. Just be sure to have all your documentation handy so that it can be formally registered. Visas are not required for Argentina, but you will require a tourist card, which can be obtained upon arrival. Back on Calgary tarmac, Canada customs is also right next door, so there is no lining up behind 300 people to clear yourself through.

The aircraft itself is a real stunner. For long-haul flights like to Buenos Aires, the Falcon 900 EX is the craft of choice and yes, one does feel on top of the world going up those steps! With three jet engines and holding 12 passengers, there is enough headroom to comfortably move around throughout the flight. Leather and lounge would describe the seats and melt into them, you do. It can cruise up to 540 miles per hour (880 kilometres) and reach elevations of up to 51,000 feet (15,500 metres).

The best part is that there is a flight attendant on board who will look after your every illogical whim and the personal attention is certainly a groovy touch. The finest of foods and

wines are abundant, served upon the shiniest of china, accompanied by the most lavish of accoutrements. DVD's and other entertainment choices abound, making for simply the most relaxing method of travel known to humankind.

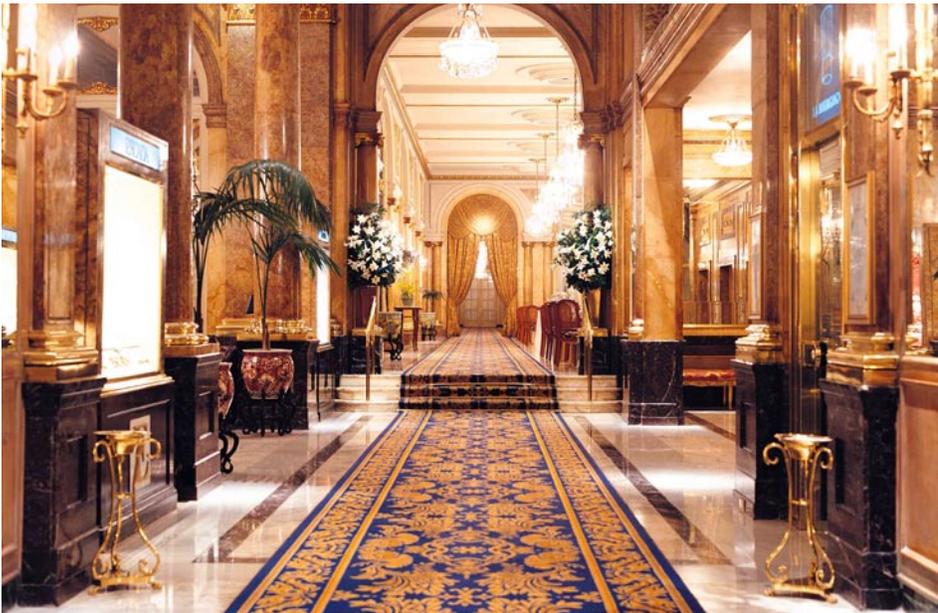
The flight itself to Buenos Aires will take more than a few hours, so when down-time is required, seats also fold down into modified beds, complete with comforters, fluffy pillows and blankets.

The cabin itself is divided into a general seating area, as well as a back, more private area, just in case you wanted someplace to tell secrets.

Like with departure, arrival in Buenos Aires is also a simple process and after checking in and getting that tourist card, it's simply a matter of picking up your bag from the rack and off you go!

Argentina itself is a vast country and though the roads are fine in the major centers, getting between them can be a challenge via land, particularly in mountainous areas and also the deep south towards Patagonia. This is where your private jet option really shines, as pretty much every place one would want to visit is serviced by an airport. The prospect of jumping into our very own airplane to hit the next destination is so much more inviting than any other travel alternative.





Buenos Aires... the Hub

Our entry point is the sprawl known as Buenos Aires. Originally christened Puerto de Nuestra Señora Santa María de los Buenos Ayres, and located about as far south of the equator as Los Angeles is north of it, this city of 12 million accommodates about a third of the country's Spanish speaking population.

Its European roots certainly gurgle to the surface as French, Italian and Spanish architecture are the commanding influences. Many generations of its residents, the porteños, have long considered themselves to be the divine holders of Euro-elegance and style, hence the Paris of South America moniker attached to the city. A younger and hungrier generation, though has only now really begun to grasp its individuality and national pride. The result is a vibrant mix of energy and self realization that is reflected in the arts, music and writing. Local creations are now canchero or "cool" and for discerning visitors there are oodles of neat things to stuff into your suitcase.

Buenos Aires is a real but complicated pleasure and there are a number of areas well-suited to visitors. Plaza de Mayo is the center of all things and the focal point around which the entire

city was built. La Recoleta is home to many museums, libraries and other important buildings, not to mention the final resting place of the iconic Eva Peron. Palermo is large and gorgeous with many parks, European styled walk-ways and even a polo field. San Telmo is an older and very pretty district that as you cobblestone along it, brings to mind the artistic soul of the city. La Boca is the most colourful area of Buenos Aires and hugging the port you'll find a stunning array of brightly painted structures, Italian cantinas and outdoor shows of many sizes and shapes.

Accommodations in Buenos Aires are exquisite. The Sofitel Buenos Aires is a graceful, funky sort of place with an Art Deco lilt that is located right in the heart of the city. Just a few paces from La Recoleta and the remarkable Teatro Colón, one of the world's great Opera houses, it dominates the elegant Arroyo Street. From its beginnings as an apartment complex to its stunning reassignment in 2002 to 144 rooms of sheer bliss, the Sofitel prides itself on the details and the immaculate interiors are certainly a joy to submerge oneself in.

Another of the superb hotels in Buenos Aires is the Faena Hotel and

Universe. Located a short walk from the Costanera Sur, the city's riverside promenade, this fiery little boutique hotel is lavish in every detail and is the perfect spot to draw upon that bellini at poolside. The rooms are self-described as providing romance and elegance and like the Sofitel, have been painstakingly created with all the extras. There is even an "experience manager" on hand to provide curious guests with all they need.

Finally, we have the Alvear Palace, a work of art first built in 1932 and seemingly trapped in a time capsule. Sophisticated doesn't begin to describe it. Located right in the La Recoleta district, this 5-star masterpiece holds many stories and its address places guests right in the middle of what Buenos Aires likes to show off. You even get your very own butler and as the go-to hotel for many heads of state, this is the one you don't want to miss!

Such a massive city has many things to do and see. The porteños themselves love to eat, drink and be merry and there is no shortage of places to do just that. Argentina may well be the meat-eating capital of the world and restaurants pride themselves on providing the juiciest fare. Barbecue eateries are everywhere, though one shouldn't expect to get into the actual dinnertime hour before 10pm. As in many Latino countries, people start late and end when the sun comes knocking. Discos don't really fire up until about 3am, either when the inferno becomes a white hot blast of techno-tango and squished-in madness. It is indeed intoxicating and blast of energy is sure to leave you breathless. Porteños consider themselves to be the coolest in all of South America and after a night out on the town it's hard to argue. Want another real Argentine experience? Buy a chair at a soccer match and watch the mayhem as thousands of delirious fans lose their voices to song and passion.



The Steamy North

About here, we leave the bright city lights - and most of the country's English speaking people - for the north, where we find the steamy rain forest area and the can't-miss destination of Iguazú Falls. Sizzling summer temperatures can hit 40 sticky degrees, so be sure to dress (or undress) for the occasion. Found in Parque Nacional Iguazú near Puerto Iguazú, the falls, comprised of 275 individual cascades, rim around a crescent shaped cliff about three kilometers around. Like Niagara Falls does with Canada and the US, the four times larger Iguazú Falls also provides a border with Brazil. Prepare yourself for thunderous noise and vivid tropical rainbows that dance wildly!

Beach Country

South of Buenos Aires we find the beach resorts on the Atlantic coast and while the shoreline gets a bit rougher and colder as you go towards the southern tip of the continent, the ones an hour's flight from the city are magnificent. Once again, aboard our Sunwest Falcon, the city of Mar del Plata beckons and 17 miles of magnificent beach. A cross between Cancun and the beaches of Rio, it

can get a little crowded with the city having a population of a half million, but it's worth a look. Further up the coastline the more exclusive beaches are found in Cariló, Villa Gessell, Vista del Mar and Pinamar. Here the beaches are much more deserted and thick forests frame the white sand. While there are distinguished hotels here, the preferred way to go is rental of private houses, many of which are nestled into the greenery of the woods.





The Magic of Patagonia

The backbone of the country is the Andes Mountains and from north to south the assortment of sights and activities is exceptionally diverse. Patagonia is a miraculous place that is unparalleled in South America. Wildlife and world-celebrated wine, adventure sports and stunning scenery are all most entrancing and leave indelible mental footprints.

One place in particular gathers a lot of interest and that is San Carlos de Bariloche. Bariloche, for short, can be compared to perhaps, Aspen, Colorado. A rapidly growing tourist area, particularly for the well-heeled, it is located on Lake Nahuel Huapi in Nahuel Huapi National Park (Argentina's first national park). The area has been celebrated for its skiing since the 1930's where today Mount Catedral attracts all sorts of snowboarders and classic two footed snow swishers. In fact there are almost 20 ski resorts all along the Andean range, meaning lots of great runs and snowy thrills.

In the summer, the lake is a paradise for boating enthusiasts and adventure mongers who like the idea of being yanked behind a speedboat or

screaming down rapids in an inflatable one. Hiking, mountain biking and saddling up for an equine adventure are also popular pursuits. A terrific place to fluff your pillow is the Llao Llao Hotel and Resort, west of town, which was built in 1940 on a spit of land between Lake Nahuel Huapi and Lake Moreno. Having lakes on either side and presided over by three mountains, make the panoramics here indeed memorable. The Llao Llao is famous for its golf and spa, not to mention all of the aforementioned outdoor diversions. If you crossed Waterton and Jasper national parks, this is the probable love child.

Heading south through the rest of Patagonia, nature takes hold and the further south you go, the more Yukon and Alaska come to mind. Walrus and orcas are found along the rocky Atlantic coast, though, the further south you go, the less wildlife you find. There aren't many 5-star living quarters down here, but there are some nice rental properties and bed and breakfasts are sprinkled throughout. The statuesque Perito Moreno Glacier, found in Los Glaciares National Park, is the only glacier in this globally warmed world that is still advancing. It stands 80 metres above

sea level, covers about 5 kilometers in area and continually "calves" huge chunks of ice into the waters.

The southernmost city in the world is Ushuaia. It is the capital of the province of Tierra del Fuego, Antártida and the South Atlantic Islands. This is also the the end of the line for the Andes mountain range and penguins rule the roost here. Unspoiled majesty would pretty much describe the visuals. This area is best known for its various cruises that include Beagle Canal, Cape Horn and what many flock here for in the first place... passage to Antarctica.

Right about here we've reached the end of the civilized world and also the end of Argentina. Standing on a jut of land as the raging sea crashes into its rocky frame, the realization comes that this spot is about as far removed from the steamy Tango clubs of Buenos Aires as Manhattan is from Iqaluit. This is Argentina, though. A vast country of unlimited resources, natural wonders, urban mysteries and a joi de vivre that is exceptionally feverish. The allure of the tango is indeed scorching, but ultimately, the cleansing spirit of its natural beauty, from tropical to arctic, is what tunnels permanently into one's head.