

Argentina

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Buenos Aires** – take in the capital’s glorious European buildings, distinctive neighborhoods, fine restaurants, sensual tango culture and throbbing nightlife (p47)
- **El Chaltén** – hike, climb and camp among the Fitz Roy range, home to some of the world’s most dramatic mountains (p152)
- **Northwest deserts** – witness the Andean northwest’s cactus-dotted deserts, highlighted with painted mountainsides and the lofty Tren a las Nubes (p105)
- **Iguazú Falls** – oooh and aaah at these unbelievable, thundering cascades, which stretch almost 3km long and 70m high (p90)
- **Off the beaten track** – the Valles Calchaquíes, running from Cafayate to Cachi, are some of Argentina’s most stunning valleys, boasting striking scenery and picturesque villages (p104)
- **Best journey** – follow in Che Guevara’s motorcycle ruts along desolate Ruta 40, the legendary road that winds along the Andean ridge and covers almost the whole of Argentina (p156)

FAST FACTS

- **Area:** 2.8 million sq km (roughly the size of India)
- **Best bargain:** who can beat a large, US\$5 grass-fed steak?
- **Best street snack:** *empanadas* (meat, vegetable or cheese turnovers)
- **Budget:** US\$25 a day
- **Capital:** Buenos Aires
- **Costs:** hostel US\$7, pasta dinner US\$3.50, 5hr bus ride US\$13
- **Country code:** ☎ 54
- **Famous for:** *gauchos* (cowboys), tango, steak and Maradona
- **Languages:** Spanish; Quechua in the Andean northwest
- **Money:** US\$1 = 3 pesos
- **Phrases:** *genial*, *bárbaro* (cool), *asqueroso* (disgusting), *fiesta/pachanga* (party)
- **Population:** 39 million
- **Time:** GMT minus 3hr
- **Tipping:** 10% in restaurants; leftover change in taxis
- **Visas:** not needed by North American and most European citizens



TRAVEL HINTS

Pack light but for Patagonia bring layers and foul-weather gear. Family photos help chat up the locals.

OVERLAND ROUTES

Argentina has three border crossings each with Bolivia, Paraguay, Brazil and Uruguay. There are many, many border crossings with Chile.

The secret is out: with its gorgeous landscapes, cosmopolitan cities, lively culture and amazingly affordable economy, Argentina is a traveler's paradise. It stretches almost 3500km from Bolivia to the tip of South America, encompassing a wide array of geography and climates, and almost reaches the size of India. Nature-lovers can traverse the Patagonian steppe, climb South America's highest peak, walk among thousands of penguins, and lie on trendy beaches. You'll love the lush Lake District with its glorious lakes and verdant mountains, and revel in Patagonia's glacier-carved landscapes and painted Andean deserts. City slickers will adore fabulous Buenos Aires, full of opportunities to learn Spanish, watch *fútbol* (soccer) games, dance the sexy tango and interact with dynamic *porteños* (people from Buenos Aires). You'll be out shopping for designer clothes at bargain prices and eating the world's best steaks every day while dancing at nightclubs all night long.

Argentina is safe, friendly and wonderfully affordable. And the time to come is now, so get your spirit in gear and prepare to have an unforgettable adventure!

CURRENT EVENTS

The big news is that the economy has been growing at a healthy pace since Argentina's financial meltdown in 2001. The country has paid off its \$10 billion debt to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), agriculture exports are rising and unemployment is falling.

Argentina is also coming to terms with its ugly past by finally prosecuting ex-military officers from its dictatorship years for human rights abuses. In 2006, March 24 – the day the Dirty War officially started – was declared a national holiday.

In other news, skeletons of some of the biggest dinosaurs that ever lived have been unearthed in Neuquén province. Huge meat-eaters in Argentina? But of course.

HISTORY

The Good Old Days

Before the Spanish hit the scene, nomadic hunter-gatherers roamed the wilds of ancient Argentina. The Yámana (or Yahgan) gathered shellfish in Patagonia, while on the pampas the Querandí used *boleadoras* (weights on cords) to snag rhea (ostrichlike birds) and guanaco (the llama's cousin). Up in the subtropical northeast, the Guaraní settled down long enough to cultivate maize, while in the arid northwest the Diaguita developed an irrigation system for crops.

In 1536 the Querandí were unfortunate enough to meet pushy Spaniards in search of silver. Like most reasonable people they refused to be treated like doormats, and eventually drove the explorers away to more welcoming Paraguay. (Left behind were cattle and horses, which multiplied and gave rise to the legendary *gaucho* – cowboy). The Spanish were persistent, however, and in 1580 they returned and

managed to establish Buenos Aires, though trade restrictions from Spain limited the new settlement's growth. The northern colonies of Tucumán, Córdoba and Salta, however, thrived by providing mules, cloth and foodstuffs for the booming silver mines of Bolivia. Meanwhile, Spaniards from Chile moved into the Andean Cuyo region, which produced wine and grain.

Cutting the Purse Strings

In 1776 Spain designated the bootlegger township of Buenos Aires as 'capital of the new viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata,' a nod to its strategic port location. A rogue British force, hoping to snag a piece of the trade pie, invaded in 1806 but was given the boot soon after by the rallied settlers. With newfound power, the confident colonists revolted against Spain, which they held a grudge against for the trade restrictions. Complete independence was their reward six years later in 1816.

Despite the unity hatched by independence, the provinces resisted Buenos Aires' authority. Argentina split allegiances between the inhabitants of Buenos Aires (Unitarists) and the country folk (Federalists). A civil war ensued, and the two parties' bloody, vindictive conflicts nearly exhausted the country.

In 1829 Juan Manuel de Rosas came into power as a Federalist, but applied his own brand of Unitarist principles to centralize control in Buenos Aires. He built a large army, created the *mazorca* (a ruthless secret police), institutionalized torture and forced overseas trade through the port city. Finally, in 1852, Justo José de Urquiza (once Rosas' supporter) led a Unitarist army that forced the dictator from power. Urquiza drew up a constitution – still in force today – and became Argentina's first president.



OPINION FROM LONELY PLANET READERS

History shapes a nation and hence its people. If Argentines are known for their pessimism, melancholy and sometimes rebellion, then perhaps all these military regimes have had an influence. Years of devaluation, inflation, social instability and – most importantly – breach of human rights, have taken their toll. Everybody knows what happened to Europe during the world wars. However, South America has had to endure these realities only a few years ago, and the consequences are still strongly felt today. The past military governments have shaped Argentina's state of mind, culture, lifestyle – and, ultimately, identity.

*Vanesa Ji Sung Lee and Karthik Paramasivan,
ex-Buenos Aires residents and avid Lonely Planet readers*

The Fleeting Golden Age

Argentina's new laws opened up the country to foreign investment, trade and immigration. In the following decades, sheep, cattle and cereal products were freely exported while Spanish, Italian, French and other European immigrants came in search of a better life. Prosperity arrived at last, and Argentina became one of the richest countries in the world, although much of that wealth belonged to relatively few landowners and urban elite.

This was a tenuous opulence, as global economic fluctuations brought about new foreign trade restrictions that mostly benefited rich producers of wheat, wine and sugar. After the 1880s poor immigrants continued to flood in to work in the port, and nearly doubled Buenos Aires' population to one million residents. The city's face changed: old colonial buildings were torn down, major streets were widened and urban services improved. The industrial sector couldn't absorb all the immigrants and their needs, however, and the gap between rich and poor widened. In 1929 the military took power from an ineffectual civilian government, but an obscure colonel – Juan Domingo Perón – was the first leader to really confront the looming social crisis.

The Peróns – Love 'em or Hate 'em

Today the Peróns have become Argentina's most revered – as well as most despised – political figures. Many people believe that Argentina has never recovered, either economically or spiritually, since Perón's first presidency.

From a minor post in the labor ministry, and with the help of his charismatic soon-to-be wife, Eva Duarte (Evita), Juan Perón won the presidency in 1946. His social welfare and new economic order programs helped the working class, who benefited from improved wages, job security and working conditions.

His heavy control over the country, however, was tinged with fascism: he abused his presidential powers by using excessive intimidation and squelching free press. Dynamic Evita, meanwhile, had her own sometimes vindictive political ends, though she was mostly championed for her charitable work and women's rights campaigns.

Rising inflation and economic difficulties (due especially to a shortage of capital from war-torn Europe) undermined Perón's second presidency in 1952; Evita's death the same year was another blow. After a coup against him in 1955, Perón retreated to Spain to plot his return. The opportunity came almost two decades later when Héctor Cámpora resigned the presidency in 1973. Perón won the elections easily, but his death in mid-1974 sucked the country back into the governmental coups and chaos that had plagued it since his exile. In 1976 military rule prevailed once again, and Argentina entered its darkest hour.

Dirty War (1976–83)

In the late 1960s, when antigovernment sentiment was rife, a left-wing, highly organized Perónist guerrilla group called the Montoneros was formed. The mostly educated, middle-class youths bombed foreign businesses, kidnapped executives for ransom and robbed banks to finance their armed struggle and to spread their social messages. On March 24, 1976, a military bloodless coup led by General Jorge Videla took control of the Argentine government and ushered in a period of terror and brutality. Euphemistically called the Process of National Reorganization (aka El Proceso), this movement became an orgy of state-sponsored violence and anarchy, and their primary target was the Montoneros.

Some estimate that up to 30,000 people died in the infamous Guerra Sucia (Dirty War).

Zero tolerance was the theme: the dictatorship did not distinguish between the revolutionary guerrillas or those who simply expressed reservations about the dictatorship's indiscriminate brutality. To 'disappear' meant to be detained, tortured and probably killed, without legal process. Ironically, the Dirty War ended only when the Argentine military attempted a real military operation, the repossession of the Islas Malvinas (Falkland Islands).

(Today, Argentina has slowly come to grips with its past by finally putting military figures from the dictatorship on trial. To remember the tragedy and prevent its repetition, the date March 24 was made into a state holiday in 2006, and given a theme: 'Nunca Mas' – Never Again. This is exactly 30 years after the Dirty War started, but better late than never.)

Falklands War

Argentina's economy continued to decline during military rule and eventually collapsed into chaos. El Proceso was coming undone.

In late 1981 General Leopoldo Galtieri took the presidential hot seat. To stay in power amid a faltering economy, a desperate Galtieri played the nationalist card and launched an invasion in April 1982 to dislodge the British from the Islas Malvinas (Falkland Islands).

The brief occupation of the Malvinas, claimed by Argentina for 150 years, unleashed a wave of nationalist euphoria that lasted about a week. Then the Argentines realized that iron-clad British prime minister Margaret

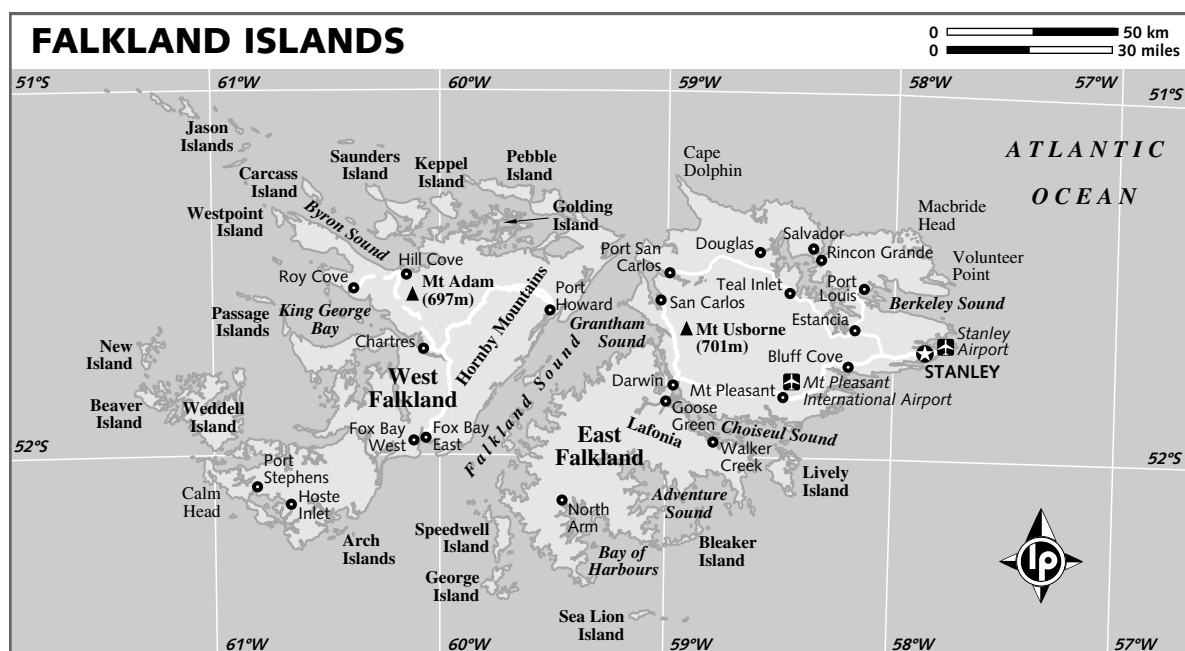
Thatcher was not a wallflower, especially when she had political troubles of her own. Britain fought back, sending a naval contingent to set things straight, and Argentina's mostly teenaged, ill-trained and poorly motivated forces surrendered after 74 days. The military, stripped of its reputation, finally withdrew from government. In 1983 Argentina handed Raúl Alfonsín the presidency.

Argentina Today

Alfonsín brought democracy back to Argentina and solved some territorial disputes with Chile. He also managed to curb inflation a bit, but couldn't pull the long-struggling country back onto its feet again.

Carlos Menem, president from 1989 to 1999, brought brief prosperity to Argentina by selling off many private industries and borrowing heavily. He also practically stopped inflation in its tracks by pegging the peso with the US dollar, but this was only a quick fix. After a few years the peso became so overvalued that Argentine goods weren't competitive on the global market. Toward the end of Menem's rule unemployment spiraled steadily upwards.

In 1999 Fernando de la Rúa was sworn into office. He inherited an almost bankrupt government which witnessed yet another economic downturn, even higher unemployment and a widespread lack of public confidence. By 2001 the economy teetered on the brink of collapse, and in December de la Rúa resigned. The country went through three more



presidents within two weeks before finally putting Eduardo Duhalde in charge. Duhalde devalued the peso in January 2002, defaulting on US\$140 billion in debt.

Since then, with the peso hovering at around three to the US dollar, things have settled down, and there's even a positive mood. Argentine exports are up and some of the

country's debts have been paid off. In May 2003 the left-leaning Néstor Kirchner was handed the presidential reins and has managed to keep the economy growing over the past few years. For Argentines, the standard of living is still one of Latin America's highest, and while times are still tough there's definitely optimism in the air.

ISLAS MALVINAS (FALKLAND ISLANDS)

☎ 500 / pop 2500

The sheep boom in Tierra del Fuego and Patagonia owes its origins to the Islas Malvinas (to the Argentines) or Falkland Islands (to the British). Very little transpired on these islands until the mid-19th-century wool boom in Europe, when the Falkland Islands Company (FIC) became the islands' largest landholder. The population, mostly stranded mariners and *gauchos* (cowboys), grew rapidly with the arrival of English and Scottish immigrants.

Argentina has laid claim to the islands since 1833, but it wasn't until 1982 that Argentine president Leopoldo Galtieri decided that reclaiming the islands would unite his country behind him. However, English Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher (who was also suffering in the polls) didn't hesitate in striking back, thoroughly humiliating Argentina. The Falkland Islands War succeeded in severing all diplomatic ties between the two nations – and today, despite a few amends, relations remain chilly.

What is there about the Falklands that might intrigue the intrepid traveler? Bays, inlets, estuaries and beaches create a tortuous, attractive coastline that is home to abundant wildlife. Striated and crested caracaras, cormorants, oystercatchers, snowy sheathbills, sheldgeese and a plethora of penguins – Magellanic, rockhopper, macaroni, gentoo and king – share top billing with elephant seals, sea lions, fur seals, killer whales and some five species of dolphins.

Stanley, the capital, is an assemblage of brightly painted metal-clad houses and is a good place to throw down a few pints and listen to island lore. 'Camp' – as the rest of the island is known – is home to settlements that began as company towns (hamlets where coastal shipping could collect wool) and now provide lodging and a chance to experience pristine nature and wildlife.

The best time to visit is from October to March, when migratory birds and mammals return to beaches and headlands. For more information in England, contact **Falkland House** (☎ 020-7222-2542; www.falklandislands.com; 14 Broadway, Westminster, London SW1H 0BH). For general information see Lonely Planet's *Falkland Islands* guidebook.

Information

Everyone entering the Falkland Islands needs an onward ticket, proof of sufficient funds (credit cards are fine) and prearranged accommodations for the first few nights. Stanley's **Visitors Centre** (☎ 22215; www.tourism.org.fk) is at the public jetty on Ross Rd.

Pounds sterling and US dollars in cash or traveler's checks are readily accepted, but the exchange rate for US currency is low. Visa and MasterCard are widely accepted. The only bank is Standard Chartered Bank in Stanley; ATMs do not exist. In peak season, expect to spend US\$70 to US\$90 per day.

Getting There & Around

Unless you're on a cruise ship, you'll arrive by air.

LANChile heads to Mt Pleasant (near Stanley) once weekly from Santiago, Chile, via Puerto Montt and Punta Arenas. Chilean airline **Aerovías DAP** (www.dap.cl) offers charter flights. There are also regular flights from RAF Brize Norton, in Oxfordshire, England.

Several tour operators run day trips to East Falkland settlements; check with the tourist office in Stanley.

THE CULTURE

The National Psyche

Argentines have a worldwide reputation for being spoiled, stuck-up and egotistical. They think they're better than anyone else, and that they belong in Europe rather than at the tail end of a third-world continent like South America. They undergo more cosmetic surgery and psychoanalysis than anyone else in the world. It's no wonder people make fun of them.

Frankly, most Argentines just don't fit this profile. And this stereotype usually refers to *porteños*. While a huge number of people do live in the capital and its suburbs, a full two-thirds live in the rest of Argentina, where attitudes and egos are more modest. In fact, many folks outside the capital don't even *like porteños*. And, not all *porteños* are sniffy aristocratic wannabes – quite a few, as you'll find out, are friendly, helpful and curious about where you come from.

It's not hard to see how Argentines got their reputation. They live in a fabulous country with vast natural resources, a gorgeous capital and rich culture. Yet they've seen their country – one that was once one of the richest in the world – collapse into almost third-world status asking for financial handouts. Even today, with a recovering economy, Argentines are cautiously optimistic about the future – and if they can maintain their proud spirit, more power to them.

Lifestyle

Despite a recent economic uplift, almost 50% of Argentines are still considered to be living in poverty. To save resources and maintain family ties, several generations often live under one roof.

Families are pretty close, and Sundays are often reserved for the family *asado* (barbecue). Friends are also highly valued and Argentines love to go out in large groups. They'll give each other cheek kisses every time they meet – even introduced strangers, men and women alike, will get a kiss.

Argentines like to stay out *late*; dinner is often at 10pm, and finishing dessert around midnight on a weekend is the norm. Bars and discos often stay open until 6am or so, even in smaller cities.

The important culture of mate is very visible in Argentina; you'll see folks sipping this bitter herb drink at home, work and play. They carry their gourds and hot-water ther-

moses while traveling and on picnics. Consider yourself honored if you're invited to partake in a mate-drinking ritual.

Population

About 90% of the country's population lives in urban areas. Argentina's literacy rate is over 97%.

Nineteenth-century immigration created a large population with feisty Italian or Spanish blood, though many other European nationalities are represented. Fresh mixes include Japanese, Koreans and Chinese (rarer outside the capital), and other South American nationalities such as Peruvians, Bolivians, Paraguayans and Uruguayans.

The major indigenous groups (thought to make up less than 2% of Argentina's population) are the Quechua of the northwest and the Mapuche of Patagonia, and smaller groups of Guaraní, Matacos, Tobas and Wichi inhabit other northern pockets. Around 15% of the country's population is *mestizo* (of mixed indigenous and European ancestry); most *mestizo* reside up north.

SPORTS

Rugby, tennis, basketball, polo, golf, motor racing, skiing and cycling are popular sports, but soccer is an obsession. The national team has twice won the World Cup, once in 1978 and again in 1986, when Diego Maradona (Argentina's bad-boy, rags-to-riches soccer star) surreptitiously punched in a goal to beat England in the quarterfinals. If you get a chance to see a *fútbol* game, take it. The game between River Plate and Boca Juniors is a classic match not to be missed, as the rivalry between the two teams is intense (see p68).

RELIGION

Over 90% of Argentina's population is Roman Catholic, but there are other popular beliefs. Spiritualism and veneration of the dead, for instance, are widespread: visitors to Recoleta and Chacarita cemeteries will see endless processions of pilgrims communing with icons like Juan and Evita Perón, Carlos Gardel and psychic Madre María. Cult beliefs like the Difunta Correa of San Juan province attract hundreds of thousands of fans; evangelical Protestantism is growing; and what is probably South America's largest Islamic mosque was built in Palermo. Buenos Aires is also home to one of the largest Jewish populations outside Israel.

ARTS

Literature

Argentina's biggest literary name is Jorge Luis Borges, famous for his short stories and poetry. Borges created alternative-reality worlds and elaborate time circles with vivid and imaginative style; check out his surreal compendiums *Labyrinths* or *Ficciones*. Internationally acclaimed Julio Cortázar wrote about seemingly normal people, while using strange metaphors and whimsical descriptions of peoples' unseen realities. His big novel is *Hopscotch*, which requires more than one reading.

Ernesto Sábato is known for his intellectual novels and essays, many of which explore the chasm between good and evil. Sábato's notable works include *On Heroes and Tombs*, popular with Argentine youth in the '60s, and the startling essay *Nunca Más*, which describes Dirty War atrocities. Other famous Argentine writers include Manuel Puig (*Kiss of the Spider Woman*), Adolfo Bioy Casares (*The Invention of Morel*), Osvaldo Soriano (*Shadows*) and Silvina Ocampo (poetry and children's stories).

Juan José Saer penned poetry, short stories and books, including complex crime novels. Novelist and journalist Rodrigo Frésan wrote the best-selling *The History of Argentina* and the psychedelic *Kensington Gardens*.

Cinema

In the past, Argentine cinema has achieved international stature through such directors as Luis Puenzo (*The Official Story*, 1984) and Héctor Babenco (*Kiss of the Spider Woman*, 1985).

More recent notable works by Argentine directors include Fabián Bielinsky's witty and entertaining *Nueve reinas* (Nine Queens; 2000), Lucrecia Martel's dysfunctional-families *La Ciénaga* (The Swamp; 2001) and Pablo Trapero's gritty *El bonaerense* (2002). Carlos Sorín's *Historias mínimas* (Minimal Stories; 2002) is a rich yet minimalist character study.

Juan José Campanella's *El hijo de la novia* (The Son of the Bride) was Oscar nominated for best foreign-language film in 2002, while Martel's *La niña santa* (The Holy Girl; 2004) won acclaim for its take on sexual awakening. Solín's *Bonbón, el perro* (Bonbón, the Dog; 2004) is a captivating tale of man's best friend and changing fortunes. And in 2005 Juan Diego Solanas won top prize at the Stockholm

Film Festival for his well-executed and mature *Nordeste* (Northeast), which tackles difficult social issues like child trafficking.

Music

Legendary figures like Carlos Gardel and Astor Piazzolla popularized tango music, and contemporaries such as Susana Rinaldi, Adriana Varela and Osvaldo Pugliese carry on the tradition. Recent tango 'fusion' groups include Gotan Project and BajoFondo Tango Club.

Folk musicians Mercedes Sosa, Leon Gieco, Atahualpa Yupanqui and Los Chalchaleros are popular performers.

Rock star Charly García is Argentina's best-known musician, but past popular groups have included Fito Páez, Los Piojos Babasónicos, Divididos and Los Fabulosos Cadillacs (who in 1998 won a Grammy for best alternative Latin rock group).

Contemporary Argentine musical artists include wacky Bersuit Vergarabat, alternative Catupecu Machu, experimental Los Natas, versatile Gazpacho and the multitalented Kevin Johansen.

Theater & Dance

Buenos Aires' monumental Teatro Colón is one of the world's finest acoustic facilities, offering classical music and ballet, among other things. The capital also has a vibrant theater community, and there's live theater in the provinces as well.

Tango is Argentina's sultry dance, thought to have started in Buenos Aires' bordellos in the 1880s. It wasn't mainstream until it was filtered through Europe, finally hitting high popularity in Argentina around 1913. Carlos Gardel is tango's most famous songbird.

Visual Arts

Well-known painters include Xul Solar, who did busy, Klee-inspired dreamscapes; Guillermo Kuitca, who experimented with cartographic illustrations; and Víctor Hugo Quiroga, who concentrated on provincial topics. Benito Quinquela Martín depicted the hard-working laborers on docks of Buenos Aires' La Boca neighborhood. Painter, poet, songwriter and '60s icon, the multifaceted Jorge de la Vega dabbled in mixed media and geometric abstracts.

Famous sculptors include Graciela Sacco, who worked in audio, video and with life's

common objects; Rogelio Yrurtia, whose art chronicles the struggles of the working people; and Alberto Heredia, who enjoyed ridiculing solemn official public art.

Buenos Aires' Galerías Pacífico, on Av Florida, has restored ceiling murals by Antonio Berni and Lino Spilimbergo, two European-influenced artists who also dealt with political themes. For street art keep an eye out for creative stencils (www.bsastencil.com.ar) and graffiti (www.bagraff.com).

ENVIRONMENT

The Land

Argentina is huge – it's the world's eighth-largest country, after India. It stretches almost 3500km north to south and encompasses a wide range of environments and terrain.

The glorious Andes line the edge of north-west Argentina, where only hardy cactus and scrubby vegetation survive. Here, soaring peaks and salt lakes give way to the more subtropical lowland provinces of Salta and Santiago del Estero. To the south, the hot and scenic Tucumán, Catamarca and La Rioja provinces harbor agriculture and viticulture.

Drier thornlands of the western Andean foothills give way to the forked river valleys and hot lowlands of Formosa and Chaco provinces. Rainfall is heaviest to the northeast, where swampy forests and subtropical savannas thrive. Densely forested Misiones province contains the awe-inspiring Iguazú Falls. Rivers streaming off these immense cataracts lead to the alluvial grasslands of Corrientes and Entre Ríos provinces. Summers here are very hot and humid.

The west-central Cuyo region (Mendoza, San Juan and San Luis provinces) pumps out most of Argentina's world-class wine vintages. Central Argentina has the mountainous Córdoba and richly agricultural Santa Fe provinces. The Pampas is a flat, rich plain full of agriculture and livestock. Along the Atlantic Coast are many popular and attractive beaches.

Patagonia spans the lower third of Argentina. Most of this region is flat and arid, but toward the Andes rainfall is abundant and supports the lush Lake District. The southern Andes boasts huge glaciers, while down on the flats cool steppes pasture large flocks of sheep.

The Tierra del Fuego archipelago mostly belongs to Chile. Its northern half resembles

the Patagonian steppe, while dense forests and glaciers cover the mountainous southern half. The climate can be relatively mild, even in winter (though temperatures can also drop below freezing). The weather in this region is very changeable year round.

Wildlife

The famous Pampas is mostly sprawling grasslands and home to many birds of prey and introduced plant species; most of the region's remaining native vegetation survives up north along the Río Paraná. Also in the northern swamplands live the odd-looking capybara (the world's largest rodent), swamp deer, the alligator-like caiman and many large migratory birds.

The main forested areas of Argentina are in subtropical Misiones province and on the eastward-sloping Andes from Neuquén province south, where southern beech species and coniferous woodlands predominate; look for the strange monkey-puzzle tree (*Araucaria araucana* or *pehuén*) around the Lake District. In the higher altitudes of the Andes and in much of Patagonia, pasture grasses are sparse. Northern Andean saline lakes harbor pink flamingos, and on the Patagonian steppe you're likely to see guanacos, rheas, Patagonian hares, armadillos, crested caracaras and gray foxes. Pumas and condors live in southern Andean foothills, but sightings are rare.

Coastal Patagonia, especially around Península Valdés, supports dense and viewable concentrations of marine fauna, including southern right whales, sea lions, southern elephant seals, orcas and Magellanic penguins.

National Parks

Argentina's national parks protect over three and a half million hectares (about 1.25% of the country's land) and have incredibly varied environments. Many outdoor-oriented cities have their own national park information office, and in Buenos Aires you can visit **Administración de Parques Nacionales** (☎ 4312-0783; www.parquesnacionales.gov.ar; Av Santa Fe 690).

Some of Argentina's best national parks: **Parque Nacional Iguazú** (p90) World-renowned for its waterfalls.

Parque Nacional Los Alerces (p143) Site of ancient *alerce* (false larch) forests.

Parque Nacional Los Glaciares (p156) Awesome for its glaciers and alpine towers.

Parque Nacional Nahuel Huapi (p139) Offers vivid alpine scenery.

Parque Nacional Tierra del Fuego (p165) Exceptional beech forests and fauna.

Parque Provincial Aconcagua (p127) Boasts the continent's highest peak.

Reserva Faunística Península Valdés (p148) Famous for coastal fauna.

Reserva Provincial Esteros del Iberá (p82) Home to swamp-dwelling wildlife.

Environmental Issues

Argentina doesn't have a huge rainforest to destroy, but does claim some environmental problems. Rapid growth in some cities (El Calafate comes to mind), related to the country's tourist boom, is seldom thought out well enough. Air and noise pollution is always a problem in Buenos Aires and other large cities. Some rural areas suffer soil erosion from improper land use or flood control, as well as river pollution from pesticide or fertilizer runoff.

Argentina has lost about two-thirds of its forests in the last century. Practically all of the pampas is now cattle grazing land, and the Patagonian steppe region suffers from overgrazing and desertification. Some celebrities, such as Kristine McDivitt Tompkins (ex-CEO of clothing company Patagonia) and Ted Turner, have bought huge tracts in Patagonia with the idea of protecting much of the land. For more information check www.vidasilvestre.org.ar and www.patagonialandtrust.com.

In 2006 folks in Gualeguaychú protested against two paper mills being built on the Uruguay River, worried about possible area contamination. Another recent environmental issue is the proposed Pascua Lama gold mine along the Chilean border; though most of the mining would be in Chile, the waste dump would be in Argentina.

TRANSPORTATION

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Cosmopolitan Buenos Aires is linked to most of the capitals in South America.

Argentina's main international airport is Buenos Aires' Aeropuerto Internacional Ministro Pistarini (known as Ezeiza). Aeroparque Jorge Newbery (known simply as Aeroparque)

DEPARTURE TAX

International passengers leaving from Ezeiza are required to pay a US\$18 departure tax in either pesos or US dollars. Other airports such as El Calafate and Ushuaia also charge departure taxes.

is the capital's domestic airport. For information on getting into town from the airports, see p48. A few other Argentine cities have 'international' airports, but they mostly serve domestic destinations.

Boat

Ferries link Buenos Aires to several points in Uruguay. For more information, see p69.

Bus

It's possible to cross into Argentina from Bolivia, Paraguay, Brazil, Uruguay and Chile. See (p36) for border cities.

GETTING AROUND

Air

The airline situation in Argentina is in constant flux; minor airlines go in and out of business regularly. Ticket prices are unpredictable, though they are always highest during holiday times (late December–February and July). Certain flights in extensive Patagonia are comparable to bus fares when you consider time saved.

Some airlines have adopted a two-tier system where foreigners pay a much higher fare than Argentine residents. Unless you're legally living in Argentina and can prove it, you'll probably pay a higher price.

The major airlines are **Aerolíneas Argentinas** (AR; www.aerolinasargentinas.com), **Austral** (www.austral.com.ar), AR's domestic partner, and **LADE** (www.lade.com.ar), the air force's passenger service, which serves mostly Patagonian destinations with cheap but infrequent flights. There's a list of principal airline offices, both international and domestic, in the Buenos Aires section (see p69), and addresses of regional offices appear in each city entry.

There may be special air-pass deals available when you plan to travel. It's best to check with a travel agency specializing in Latin America, since deals come and go regularly. One theme with these passes is that they need to be purchased outside Argentina (sometimes

FLIGHT WARNING

Be aware that domestic flights in Argentina can often arrive late, and in high season many flights (especially to Patagonia) book up early. The occasional strike can dampen your travel plans, so if it's important you arrive on time (like to Ushuaia, for an Antarctic cruise) plan on getting to your destination a day earlier.

in conjunction with an international ticket), you need to be a foreign resident to use them, and they're often limited to travel within a certain time period.

For more information, see p1081.

Bicycle

Cycling around the country has become popular among travelers. Beautiful routes in the north include the highway from Tucumán to Tañi del Valle, the direct road from Salta to San Salvador de Jujuy, and the Quebrada de Cafayate. The Lake District also has scenic roads, like the Siete Lagos route. Drawbacks include the wind (which can slow progress to a crawl in Patagonia) and reckless motorists. Less-traveled secondary roads carrying little traffic are good alternatives. Rental bikes are common in tourist areas and a great way to get around.

For information on biking around South America see p1082.

Bus

Long-distance buses are modern, fast, comfortable and usually the best budget way to get around Argentina. Journeys over six hours or so will either have pit stops for refreshments or serve drinks, sweet snacks and sometimes simple meals. All have bathrooms, though they're often grungy (bring toilet paper). The most luxurious companies offer more expensive *coche cama* recliners (overnight trips save hotel costs), but regular buses are usually fine, even on long trips.

Bus terminals usually have kiosks, restrooms, cheap eats and luggage storage. In small towns you'll want to be aware of the timetable of your next bus out (and possibly buy a ticket), since some routes run infrequently. During holiday periods like January, February or July, buy advance tickets.

Car

Renting a car in Argentina is not cheap, but can get you away from the beaten path and start you on some adventures. Figure US\$50 per day average for the cheapest model with some free mileage (consider partnering up with others to share the costs). The minimum driving age in Argentina is 18, but car rental offices require drivers to be at least 21.

Forget driving in Buenos Aires; traffic is unforgivable and parking is a headache, while public transport is great. See Legal Matters (p170) for dealing with police.

The Automobile Club Argentina (ACA) has offices, service stations and garages in major cities. If you're a member of an overseas affiliate (like AAA in the United States) you may be able to obtain vehicular services and discounts on maps (bring your card). ACA's main headquarters is in **Buenos Aires** (☎ 4802-6061; www.aca.org.ar; Av del Libertador 1850, Palermo).

Hitchhiking

Good places for a pickup are gas stations on the outskirts of large cities, where truckers refuel their vehicles. In Patagonia, distances are great and vehicles few, so expect long waits and carry snack foods and warm, windproof clothing. Carry extra water as well, especially in the desert north. Realize that many cars are full with families.

Haciendo dedo is fairly safe for women in Argentina; however, don't do it alone, don't get in a car with two men and don't do it at night. There is also nothing especially unsafe

GETTING TO CHILE

For most travelers, crossing the border from Argentina into Chile is a relatively quick, easy procedure. Usually the same bus takes you right through and there are no fees. Border outposts are open daylight hours; Dorotea (near Puerto Natales) is open 24 hours in summer. Just have your papers in order, don't take anything illegal (including fresh food) and you should be golden. And try to get your ticket as soon as possible, as Chile-bound buses often fill up quickly. Note that you do have to get off and on the bus for passport checks on both sides. For information on crossing the border from Chile, see p417.

about hitchhiking in rural Argentina, but don't hitchhike in Buenos Aires.

Having a sign will improve your chances for a pickup, especially if it says something like *visitando Argentina de Canada* (visiting Argentina from Canada), rather than just a destination.

For good information see www.autostopargentina.com.ar (in Spanish).

Local Transportation

Even small towns have good bus systems. A few cities use magnetic fare cards, which are usually bought at kiosks. Pay attention to placards indicating an ultimate destination, since identically numbered buses may cover slightly different routes.

Taxis have digital-readout meters that start at about US\$0.75. Tipping isn't expected, but you can leave extra change. *Remises* are taxis that you book over the phone, or regular cars without meters; any hotel or restaurant should be able to call one for you. They're considered more secure than taxis since an established company sends them out. Ask the fare in advance.

Buenos Aires is the only city with a subway system, known as Subte.

Train

The British-built train system in Argentina is not as widespread as it once was, and currently bus travel is faster, more flexible and more reliable. There are long-distance services from Buenos Aires to Rosario and the Atlantic beach resorts, and from Viedma to Bariloche. Buenos Aires and Rosario have commuter routes to their suburbs.

The very scenic, famous and expensive *Tren a las Nubes* chugs from Salta, in the north, toward Chile. In Patagonia there are a couple of short touristy train rides (both narrow-gauge) such as *La Trochita*, which originates in Esquel or El Maitén, and *El Tren del Fin del Mundo*, in Ushuaia.

BUENOS AIRES

☎ 011 / pop 13 million (greater BA)

Believe everything you've heard – Buenos Aires is one of South America's most electrifying cities, graced with European architecture, atmospheric neighborhoods and bustling nightlife. It has the sophistication of a fine-cut

diamond, the charm of an unshaved Casanova, the mind of a frenzied lunatic and the attitude of a celebrity supermodel. And BA's passionate residents are prideful and haughty, but once you get to know them they'll bend over backwards to help.

Since Argentina's economic collapse in 2002, BA has quelled doubters by bouncing back and creating a renaissance that's keeping the city aglow. Argentines now find the 'outside' world prohibitively expensive, and have turned their energy inwards – with impressive results. Loads of new restaurants, boutiques and businesses have popped up in the last few years, not only to deal with the locals and their pesos, but also to cater to the influx of foreign tourists bringing hard currency and taking advantage of incredible bargains.

Yet to every great metropolis is a poor side. Cracked sidewalks, ubiquitous graffiti and rough edges – even in the wealthiest neighborhoods – speak volumes about this city. Poverty and beggars exist, and at night the *cartoneros* (garbage recyclers) appear. There's a deep melancholy here – an acknowledgment of Argentina's riches coupled with the despair of not realizing its potential. The undeniable reality is that BA comes with a third-world twist.

So throw yourself into this heady mix and hold on tight, 'cause you're going for a wild, fun ride. And don't be surprised if you fall in love with this amazing and sexy place – you won't be the first, or the last.

ORIENTATION

Buenos Aires is a very large city, but most sights are within the compact downtown area. Interesting surrounding *barrios* (neighborhoods) are easily accessed via public transport. The major thoroughfare is broad Av 9 de Julio; all north-south streets (except for Av 9 de Julio) change names at Av Rivadavia.

DON'T MISS...

- strolling busy Av Florida
- savoring a steak dinner
- enjoying a tango show
- exploring Recoleta cemetery
- experiencing a *fútbol* game
- shopping at San Telmo's antiques fair

GETTING INTO TOWN

If you fly into Buenos Aires from outside Argentina, you'll probably land at **Ezeiza Airport** (☎ 5480-6111; www.aa2000.com.ar), about 35km south of the city center. Ezeiza is clean and modern and has food services, shops, (expensive) internet access and luggage storage.

The best way into town is to take the frequent, comfortable shuttle service by **Manuel Tienda León** (MTL; US\$8, 40 minutes); its booth is just outside customs. For taxis avoid MTL's hiked-up prices and head behind it to the city taxi booth, which charges around US\$18 (including tolls). *Do not* go with just any taxi driver; make sure you find the booth and pay up front. Hard-core penny-pinchers can take bus 86 (US\$0.75, 1½ hours) from outside the Aerolíneas Argentinas (domestic) terminal, which is a short walk away.

If you need to change money, avoid the *cambios* (exchange houses) as their rates are bad. Instead, head to the nearby Banco de la Nación, which has fair rates and should be open 24 hours.

Most domestic flights land at **Aeroparque Jorge Newbery** (Map p49; ☎ 5480-6111; www.aa2000.com.ar), only a few kilometers north of the city center. Manuel Tienda León shuttles to the city center cost US\$3 (15 minutes). Buses to the center include the 33 and 45; take them going south (to the right as you leave the airport; US\$0.30). Taxis cost about US\$5.

Shuttle transfers from Ezeiza to Aeroparque cost US\$8.50.

Retiro bus station (Map pp52-3) is about 1km north of the city center. Hundreds of BA's local bus lines converge here; outside, it's a seething mass and not to be figured out after a 14-hour bus ride. You can take the Subte (subway) if your destination is near a Subte stop, or seek out the 24-hour information kiosk (at the south end of the station) for help with bus lines. Taxis are cheap; try to get one marked 'radio taxi' on the doors. The tourist information office (look for it under bus counter 105) is only open 7:30am to 1pm Monday to Saturday.

The *microcentro* (city center; north of Av de Mayo and east of Av 9 de Julio) is the heart of BA's downtown bustle. To the north are chic Recoleta, Barrio Norte and Palermo, while to the south lie the working-class neighborhoods of San Telmo and La Boca. The waterside *barrio* Puerto Madero, with its modernized brick warehouses and promenades, lies east of downtown.

For help getting around check out Lonely Planet's *Buenos Aires* map.

INFORMATION

Bookstores

ABC (Map pp52-3; Maipú 866) English and German books, including Lonely Planet guides, are available here.

El Ateneo (Map pp52-3; cnr Av Florida 340) Has some books in English. There's another branch at Av Santa Fe 1860.

Walrus Books (Map pp52-3; Estados Unidos 617; ☎ closed Mon) Used books in English; run by an American. Buys books in excellent condition.

Cultural Centers

Biblioteca Lincoln (Map pp52-3; ☎ 5382-1528; www.bcl.edu.ar; Maipú 672) English-language books, newspapers and magazines; to check out materials must join up (US\$23 per year).

Centro Cultural Borges (Map pp52-3; ☎ 5008-8011; www.ccborges.org.ar; San Martín cnr Via-monte) Dance classes and art exhibits of all kinds, plus plenty more.

Centro Cultural Recoleta (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4803-1040; www.centroculturalrecoleta.org; Junín 1930) Inexpensive exhibitions, theater, classes etc.

Centro Cultural Ricardo Rojas (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4954-5521; www.rojas.uba.ar in Spanish; Av Corrientes 2038) Zillions of inexpensive, art-oriented classes.

Centro Cultural San Martín (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4374-1251; www.ccgsm.gov.ar; Sarmiento 1551) Inexpensive galleries, theater, lectures, films and workshops.

Emergency

Ambulance ☎ 107

Fire ☎ 107

Police ☎ 101

Rape Crisis Line ☎ 4981-6882, 4958-4291

Tourist Police (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4346-5748, 0800-999-5000; Av Corrientes 436; ☎ 24hr) Provides interpreters and helps crime victims.

Immigration Offices

Immigration (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4317-0200; www.migraciones.gov.ar; Av Antártida Argentina 1355; ☎ 8am-1pm Mon-Fri)

Internet Access

Internet access is everywhere and connections are relatively fast. Charges run about US\$50¢ per hour.

Medical Services

Most of BA's hospitals have English-speaking staff; call for appointments.

British Hospital (www.hospitalbritanico.org.ar) Perdriel (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4304-1081; Perdriel 74); Marcelo T de Alvear (Map pp52-3 ☎ 4812-0040; Marcelo T de Alvear 1573)

Hospital Municipal Juan Fernández (Map pp56-7; ☎ 4808-2650; CerViño 3356)

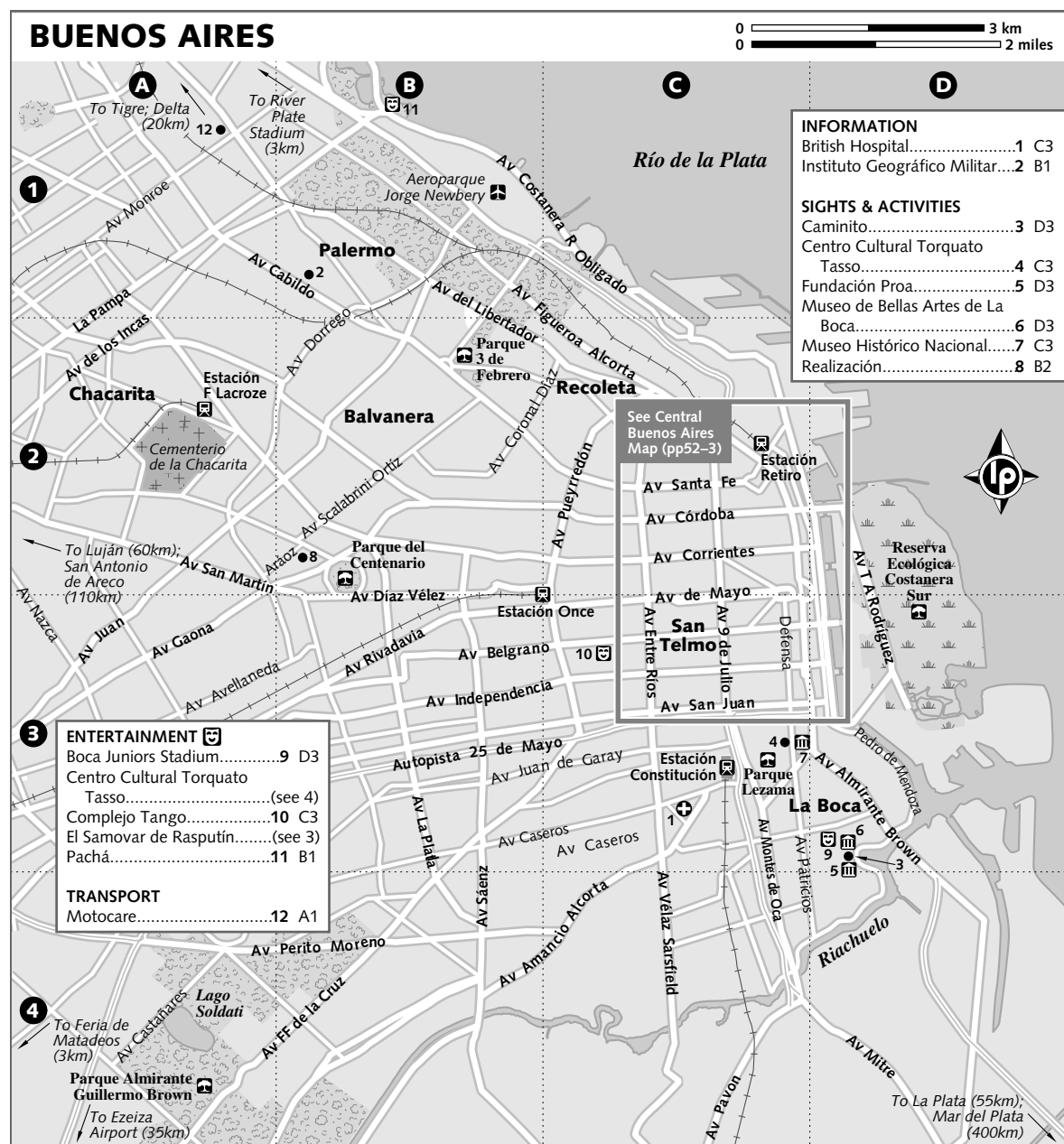
Money

The 2001 peso crash stimulated a gray market for US dollars. You may hear people on pedes-

trian Av Florida call out 'cambio, cambio,' but it's wiser to change money at a bank or *cambio* (exchange house) – scams and counterfeit bills do exist.

Some banks won't change less than US\$100 and may require ID. *Cambios* have slightly poorer exchange rates, but are usually much quicker and have fewer limitations. US dollars are accepted at many retail establishments at a pretty fair rate.

Traveler's checks are very hard to cash (try exchange houses rather than banks) and incur bad exchange rates; one exception is **American Express** (Map pp52-3; Arenales 707). ATMs are commonplace. Visa and MasterCard holders might be able to get cash advances, but ask your bank before traveling.



Post

Correo Postal Internacional (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4891-9191; www.correoargentino.com.ar; Av Antártida Argentina) Near Retiro bus station. For international parcels 2kg to 20kg; website has prices. Bring open box, contents must be checked; boxes sold here.

FedEx (Map pp52-3; ☎ 0810-333-3339; www.fedex.com; Maipú 753) Several branches.

Main post office (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4316-3000; Sarmiento 151) Many branches; parcels under 2kg accepted.

Telephone

The easiest way to make a call is from a *locutorio* (telephone office), where you enter a booth and make calls in a safe, quiet environment. Costs are comparable to street telephones and you don't need change. Most *locutorios* offer reasonably priced fax and internet services as well.

Public phones are numerous; use coins, or buy a magnetic phone card from any kiosk.

Tourist Information

Buenos Aires' many small tourist offices (www.bue.gov.ar) are spread out in key tourist locations throughout the city.

Florida tourist kiosk (Map pp52-3; cnr Avs Florida & Diagonal Roque Sáenz Peña)

Galerías Pacífico kiosk (Map pp52-3; cnr Avs Florida & Córdoba, 2nd fl)

Puerto Madero tourist kiosk (Map pp52-3; Av Alicia Moreau de Justo, dique 4)

Recoleta tourist kiosk (Map pp52-3; cnr Av Quintana & RM Ortiz)

Retiro bus station (Map pp52-3; suite L83, under bus counter 105)

San Telmo kiosk (Map pp52-3; Defensa 1250)

Secretaría de Turismo de la Nación (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4312-2232, 0800-555-0016; www.turismo.gov.ar; Av Santa Fe 883) Mostly info on Argentina but helps with BA.

South American Explorers (www.saexplorers.org) Membership costs US\$50 (US\$80 for couples; 20% student discount). Great source of South American travel information. Also stores luggage, receives mail, offers internet and wi-fi, has library with book exchange, puts on events and maintains bulletin board.

Travel Agencies

Asatej (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4114-7566; www.asatej.com; Av Florida 835, 3rd fl) This place is busy but cheap; come early or wait. Sells International Student Identity Cards (ISIC).

Say Hueque (Map pp52-3; ☎ 5199-2517; www.sayhueque.com; Viamonte 749, 6th fl) Friendly, excel-

lent service. This place mostly books adventure trips for backpackers around Argentina, but also books BA activities like tango shows.

Tangol (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4312-7276; www.tangol.com; Av Florida 971, suite 31) Organizes adventurous activities such as skydiving, *estancia* (ranch) visits, helicopter flights and night tours of BA. Also takes travelers to *fútbol* games.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Petty crime certainly exists in Buenos Aires, as it does in any big metropolis. In general, however, BA is pretty safe. You can comfortably walk around at all hours of the night in many places, even as a lone woman (people stay out very late, and there's often other pedestrians on the streets). Truth be told, most tourists who visit this great city have fabulous experiences – but they're travel smart and don't wear fancy jewelry, or stagger around drunk with their purses and wallets hanging out. They're cautious of pickpockets in crowded places. They're aware of their surroundings and at least *pretend* to know where they're going.

If anything, BA is besieged more by minor nuisances. When buying anything, try not to get shortchanged and keep an eye out for fake bills (see the watermark?). Watch carefully for traffic when crossing streets, and look out for the piles of dog crap underfoot. Note that fresh air is often lacking – air pollution and smoking are big issues. Dealing with taxis are another thing; see p71 for tips.

Every city has its edgy neighborhoods, and in BA these include Constitución Estación (train station), the eastern border of San Telmo and La Boca (where, outside tourist streets, you should be careful even during the day). Av Florida is best avoided only very, very late at night. See p48 under Emergency for the tourist police.

SIGHTS

At Buenos Aires' heart is its *microcentro* (city center), which holds many of the city's historical buildings and museums. To the north lies upper-crust Recoleta, with its famous cemetery, and park-filled Palermo, home to many great restaurants and bars. Down south is where the blue-collar class hangs: this includes tango-mecca San Telmo and colorful, roughhousing La Boca. There's enough bustle in this city to keep you trotting around all day and all night.

City Center

Buenos Aires' *microcentro* holds many 19th-century European buildings, which surprises many travelers expecting a more Latin American feel. The liveliest street here is pedestrian **Av Florida**, packed with masses of harried businesspeople, curious tourists and angling leather salespeople. Make sure to stop at **Galerías Pacífico** (Map pp52–3), one of BA's most gorgeous shopping malls; peek at the ceiling paintings inside. South of Av Florida is busy Av Corrientes, and if you head west on this thoroughfare you'll cross superbroad Av 9 de Julio (run!). It's decisively punctuated by the famously phallic **Obelisco** (Map pp52–3) a major symbol of Buenos Aires. Just beyond is the city's traditional theater district, also full of many cheap bookstores.

The remodeled 18th-century **Museo del Cabildo** (Map pp52–3; admission US\$0.35, Fridays free; ☎ 10:30am–5pm Tue–Fri, 11:30am–6pm Sun) is all that's left of the colonial arches that once surrounded Plaza de Mayo. Nearby, the neo-classical **Catedral Metropolitana** (Map pp52–3; finished in 1827) contains the tomb of liberator José de San Martín, Argentina's most venerated historical figure. A block east you'll see the pink presidential palace, **Casa Rosada** (Map pp52–3) and the famous balcony where vibrant Evita energized adoring crowds during her heyday in the 1940s. Around the southern side of the building is **Museo de la Casa Rosada** (Map pp52–3; admission US\$0.35; ☎ 10am–6pm Mon–Fri, 2–6pm Sun), the most interesting feature of which is the catacombs of the Fuerte Viejo, an 18th-century colonial ruin. Free English tours of the Casa Rosada are given at 5pm Friday; reserve in person a few hours beforehand and take identification.

A block south of Plaza de Mayo is **Manzana de las Luces** (Block of Enlightenment; Map pp52–3), a solid square of 18th-century buildings that includes **Iglesia San Ignacio**, Buenos Aires' oldest church, and **Colegio Nacional**, an elite secondary school. Underground are old defensive military tunnels.

Over to the west, at the other end of Av de Mayo, is the green-domed **Palacio del Congreso** (Map pp52–3; modeled on Washington, DC's Capitol Building). It was completed in 1906 and faces pigeon-filled Plaza del Congreso and its **Monumento a los Dos Congresos**, the granite steps of which symbolize the Andes.

Since its opening in 1908, visitors have marveled at magnificent **Teatro Colón** (Map pp52–3;

☎ 4378-7133; www.teatrocolon.org.ar), further north at Tucumán 1171. The luxurious seven-story building seats 2500 spectators on plush red-velvet chairs and surrounds them with tiers of gilded balconies; it's a world-class facility for opera, ballet and classical music. Several daily tours in English and Spanish are given (US\$4, reserve one day in advance).

East of the city center is BA's newest barrio, **Puerto Madero** (Map pp52–3). This renovated docklands area is lined with pleasant pedestrian walkways, expensive lofts, trendy restaurants and bars and some of the city's priciest hotels. Further east is the completely different world of **Reserva Ecológica Costanera Sur** (Map p49; ☎ 8am–7pm Nov–March, to 6pm Apr–Oct), a large marshy ecological reserve with dirt paths and natural landscapes. The entrance is east of San Telmo, via the street R Vera Peñaloza.

San Telmo

Six blocks south of Plaza de Mayo, San Telmo – home of BA's main tango culture – is full of cobbled streets and aging mansions. Historically its low rents have attracted artists, but prices are up and these days you'll see more boutiques than studios. The neighborhood was a fashionable place until 1870, when a series of epidemics over 20 years drove the rich elite northwards; many houses were then subdivided and turned into cramped immigrant shelters.

On Sundays, **Plaza Dorrego** (Map pp52–3) buzzes with its famous **antiques fair**: hordes of tourists clash elbows for rusty pocket watches, vintage dresses, ancient crystal- and metalware, delicate china and old coins. Good tango street shows add excitement and photo ops, but don't forget to drop some change into the hat. Surrounding the plaza are pleasant cafés where you can sip anything from cognacs to *cortados* (coffee with milk) while lazily people-watching. Afterwards, stroll the atmospheric streets to window-shop for that perfect *victrola* (gramophone) – you just may find it. At night check out the clubs that put on those famous tango shows.

Four blocks south at Defensa and Brasil is leafy **Parque Lezama** (Map p49), the presumptive site of Buenos Aires' foundations; mix with the locals playing chess, or visit the large and well-presented **Museo Histórico Nacional** (Map p49; admission US\$5¢; ☎ 11am–6pm Tue–Sun, closed Jan).

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Opera Bay.....	136	F4
Palacio Alsina.....	137	C6
Taconeando.....	138	E7
Tangol.....	(see 41)	
Teatro Colón.....	(see 61)	
Teatro General San Martín.....	139	B5

TRANSPORT

Aerolíneas Argentinas.....	140	D6
Aerolíneas Argentinas.....	141	D3
Air Canada.....	142	D4
Air France.....	143	D5
Alitalia.....	144	D3
American Airlines.....	145	D3
Austral.....	(see 141)	
Austral.....	(see 140)	
Avis.....	146	C2
British Airways.....	147	C2
Buquebus.....	148	E3
Buquebus Office.....	149	D4
Buses to La Plata.....	150	E2
Delta.....	151	E4
Hertz.....	152	C3
KLM.....	(see 143)	
LADE.....	153	D7
Lan.....	154	C3
Lloyd Aéreo Boliviano.....	155	C5
Lufthansa.....	156	D3
Manuel Tienda León (MTL).....	157	E2
New Way.....	158	D3
Pluna.....	159	D5
Retiro Bus Station.....	160	E1
Swissair.....	(see 21)	
Transportes Aéreos de Mercosur (TAM).....	161	C3
United Airlines.....	162	E3
Varig.....	163	C4

La Boca

Vivid, working-class La Boca, situated along the old port and at the *boca* (mouth) of the Río Riachuelo, was built by Italian immigrants from Genoa. Its main attraction is colorful **Caminito** (Map p49), a short pedestrian walk lined with corrugated-metal buildings. Local artists display their brightly colored paintings, adding to the vibrant ambience. The neighborhood is also home to the Boca Juniors soccer team (see p68 for more information).

Boca's standing as an artists' enclave is the legacy of painter Benito Quinquela Martín; his old home and studio is **Museo de Bellas Artes de La Boca** (Map p49; Pedro de Mendoza 1835; donation US\$35¢; ☎ 10am-5:30pm Mon-Fri, 11am-5:30pm Sat & Sun). Also, don't miss the excellent **Fundación Proa** (Map p49; www.proa.org; Pedro de Mendoza 1929; admission US\$1; ☎ 11am-7pm Tue-Sun), which exhibits cutting-edge contemporary art; there's a wonderful view from its rooftop.

Be aware that this is one of the poorer *barrios* of Buenos Aires and, whether day or night, you shouldn't wander from the beaten path of tourist hangouts. Buses 29, 130 and 152 run to La Boca.

Recoleta

One of Buenos Aires' prime tourist attractions, **Cementerio de la Recoleta** (Map pp52-3; ☎ 7am-6pm) sits in the plushiest of neighborhoods, ritzy Recoleta. High walls surround this necropolis where, in death as in life, generations of Argentina's elite rest in ornate splendor. It's fascinating to wander around and explore this extensive minicity of lofty statues, detailed marble façades and earthy-smelling sarcophagi. Follow the crowds and you'll find Evita's grave.

Next to the cemetery is the 1732 **Iglesia de Nuestra Señora de Pilar** (Map pp52-3) and Centro Cultural Recoleta (p48), which hosts cultural events. A weekend hippie fair takes place on the surrounding paths, attracting lively performers and crowds of tourists. Sit at a café and take in the nearby attractive greenery of **Plaza Intendente Alvear**; note the giant *ombú* trees. If you're lucky you'll spot a *paseaperros* (professional dog-walker) strolling with 15 or so leashed canines of all shapes and tails.

The **Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes** (Av del Libertador 1473; admission free; ☎ 12:30-7:30pm Tue-Fri, 9:30am-7:30pm Sat & Sun) houses works by famous French

impressionists and Argentine artists; it's well worth a visit.

Palermo

Full of green parks, imposing statues, elegant embassies and large sporting complexes, Palermo on a sunny weekend afternoon is a *porteño* yuppie magnet. **Jardín Botánico Carlos Thays** (botanical gardens; Map pp56-7) is good for a stroll, while the **Jardín Zoológico** (zoo; Map pp56-7; ☎ 4806-7411; cnr Avs Las Heras & Sarmiento; admission US\$2-3.50; ☎ 10-6pm Jan & Feb, 10-5pm Tue-Sun Mar-Dec) has mostly humane animal enclosures and some attractive classic structures to boot. There's also the pleasant **Jardín Japonés** (Japanese Gardens; Map pp56-7; ☎ 4804-4922; cnr Avs Casares & Berro; admission Mon-Fri US\$1, Sat & Sun US\$1.35; ☎ 10am-6pm). The **Rosedal** (rose garden; Map pp56-7) is OK during the day, but be warned – at night it's a transvestite hangout. On weekends, rent bikes and cruise the lakes of **Parque 3 de Febrero** (Map pp56-7).

Not too far from these green spots is the cutting-edge **Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires** (Malba; Map pp56-7; www.malba.org.ar; Av Presidente Figuero Alcorta 3415; admission US\$3.25, Wed free; ☎ noon-8pm Mon, Thu-Fri, noon-9pm Wed, 10am-8pm Sat & Sun), which has exhibitions by Latin American artists. Another interesting place is **Museo Evita** (Map pp56-7; Lafinur 2988; admission US\$75¢; ☎ 3-8pm Tue-Sun), chronicling this legendary and effervescent woman's life and work. Palermo also contains the **Campo de Polo** (polo grounds; Map pp56-7), **Hipódromo** (racetrack; Map pp56-7) and **Planetario** (observatory; ☎ 4771-9393; cnr Avs Sarmiento & Belisario Roldán; admission free, astronomy shows US\$1.50; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 1-7.30pm Sat & Sun).

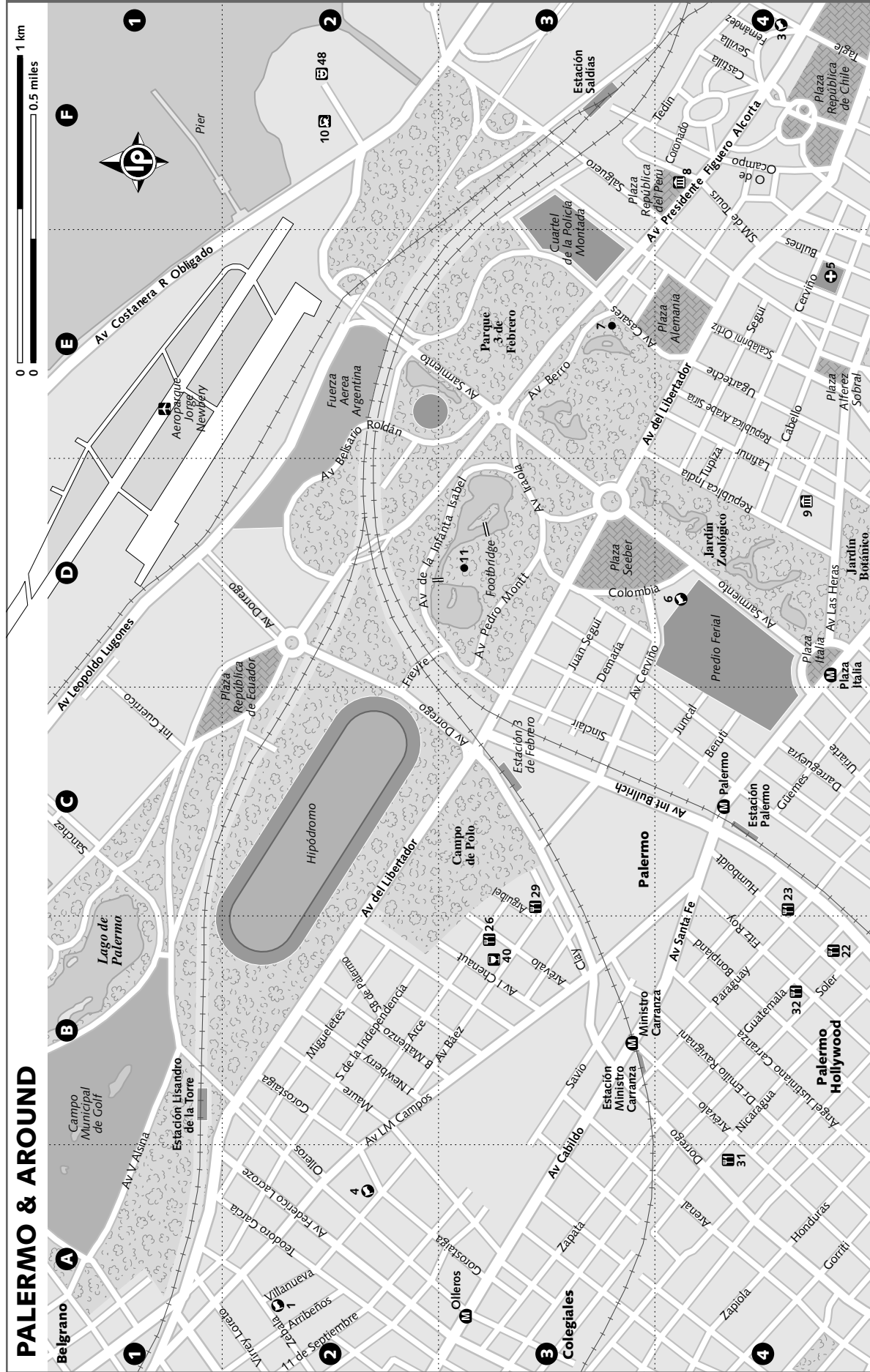
Make sure to stroll through the subneighborhood of **Palermo Viejo** (Map pp56-7), just south of the parks; it's further divided into Palermo Soho and Palermo Hollywood. Here you'll find BA's hippest restaurants and trendiest boutiques, along with some lively nightlife. Its beautiful old buildings make for some great wanderings, and many expats have planted roots here.

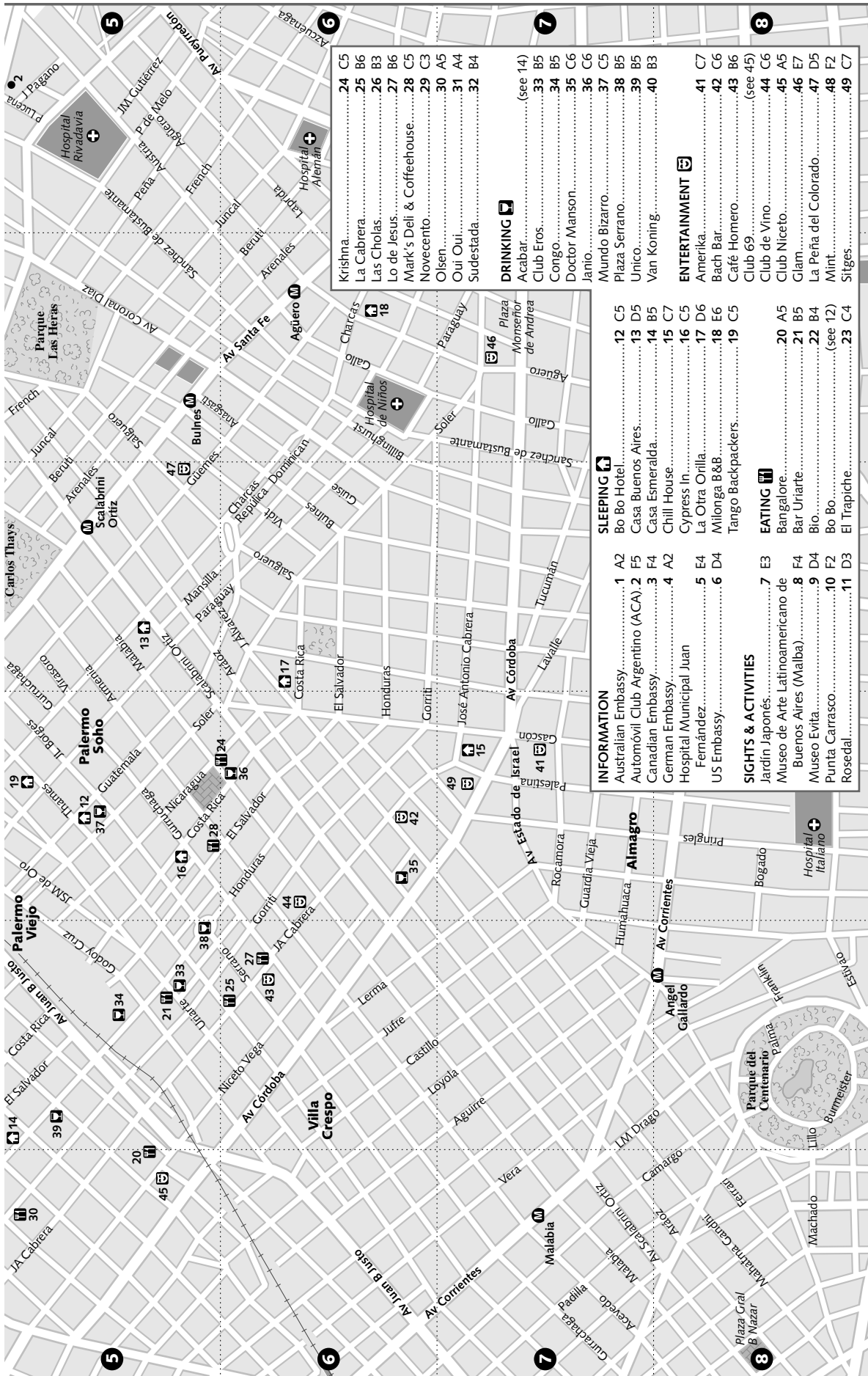
ACTIVITIES

Porteños' main activities are probably walking, shopping and dancing tango. Those searching for greener pastures, however, head to Palermo's parks, where joggers run past strolling families and *fútbol* scrimmages (join in only if you're very, very confident of your skills).

Safe cycling is possible in this city, but only in specific places. Good places to pedal are

ARGENTINA





- | | |
|---------------------------|-------|
| Krishna | 24 C5 |
| La Cabrera | 25 B6 |
| Las Cholas | 26 B3 |
| Lo de Jesus | 27 B6 |
| Mark's Deli & Coffeehouse | 28 C5 |
| Novocento | 29 C3 |
| Olsen | 30 A5 |
| Oui Oui | 31 A4 |
| Sudestada | 32 B4 |
- DRINKING**
- | | |
|---------------|----------|
| Acabar | (see 14) |
| Club Eros | 33 B5 |
| Congo | 34 B5 |
| Doctor Manson | 35 C6 |
| Janio | 36 C6 |
| Mundo Bizarro | 37 C5 |
| Plaza Serrano | 38 B5 |
| Unico | 39 B5 |
| Van Koning | 40 B3 |
- ENTERTAINMENT**
- | | |
|----------------------|----------|
| Amerika | 41 C7 |
| Bach Bar | 42 C6 |
| Café Homero | 43 B6 |
| Club 69 | (see 45) |
| Club de Vino | 44 C6 |
| Club Niceto | 45 A5 |
| Glam | 46 E7 |
| La Peña del Colorado | 47 D5 |
| Mint | 48 F2 |
| Sitges | 49 C7 |

- SLEEPING**
- | | |
|-------------------|-------|
| Bo Bo Hotel | 12 C5 |
| Casa Buenos Aires | 13 D5 |
| Casa Esmeralda | 14 B5 |
| Chill House | 15 C7 |
| Cypress In | 16 C5 |
| La Otra Orilla | 17 D6 |
| Milonga B&B | 18 E6 |
| Tango Backpackers | 19 C5 |
- EATING**
- | | |
|-------------|----------|
| Bangalore | 20 A5 |
| Bar Uriarte | 21 B5 |
| Bio | 22 B4 |
| Bo Bo | (see 12) |
| El Trapiche | 23 C4 |

- INFORMATION**
- | | |
|-----------------------------------|------|
| Australian Embassy | 1 A2 |
| Automóvil Club Argentino (ACA) | 2 F5 |
| Canadian Embassy | 3 F4 |
| German Embassy | 4 A2 |
| Hospital Municipal Juan Fernández | 5 E4 |
| US Embassy | 6 D4 |
- SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES**
- | | |
|---|-------|
| Jardín Japonés | 7 E3 |
| Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires (Malba) | 8 F4 |
| Museo Evita | 9 D4 |
| Punta Carrasco | 10 F2 |
| Rosedal | 11 D3 |

Palermo's parks (see p55) and Puerto Madero and its nearby Reserva Ecológica Costanera Sur (see p51). You can rent bikes from bike tour companies, who also do guided tours (see opposite).

Other than at major hotels and gyms, tennis courts and swimming pools can be found in Palermo's parks and at **Punta Carrasco** (Map pp56-7; ☎ 4807-1010; www.puntacarrasco.com.ar; cnr Costanera Norte & Sarmiento). Climbers can head to **Realización** (Map p49; ☎ 4854-6009; Aráoz 129), a climbing gym way over in Villa Crespo.

Some companies like **Tangol** (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4312-7276; www.tangol.com; Av Florida 971, suite 31) offer activities such as skydiving, helicopter tours and *estancia* visits, which often include horse-riding.

WALKING TOUR

Recoleta is Buenos Aires' wealthiest neighborhood. Here the privileged elite shop in expensive boutiques, sip tea at elegant cafés and walk their purebred dogs. It's also where they're put to rest when they die.

Start your walk at **Cementerio de la Recoleta** (1; p55), where you can spend hours visiting hundreds of elaborate sarcophagi. When

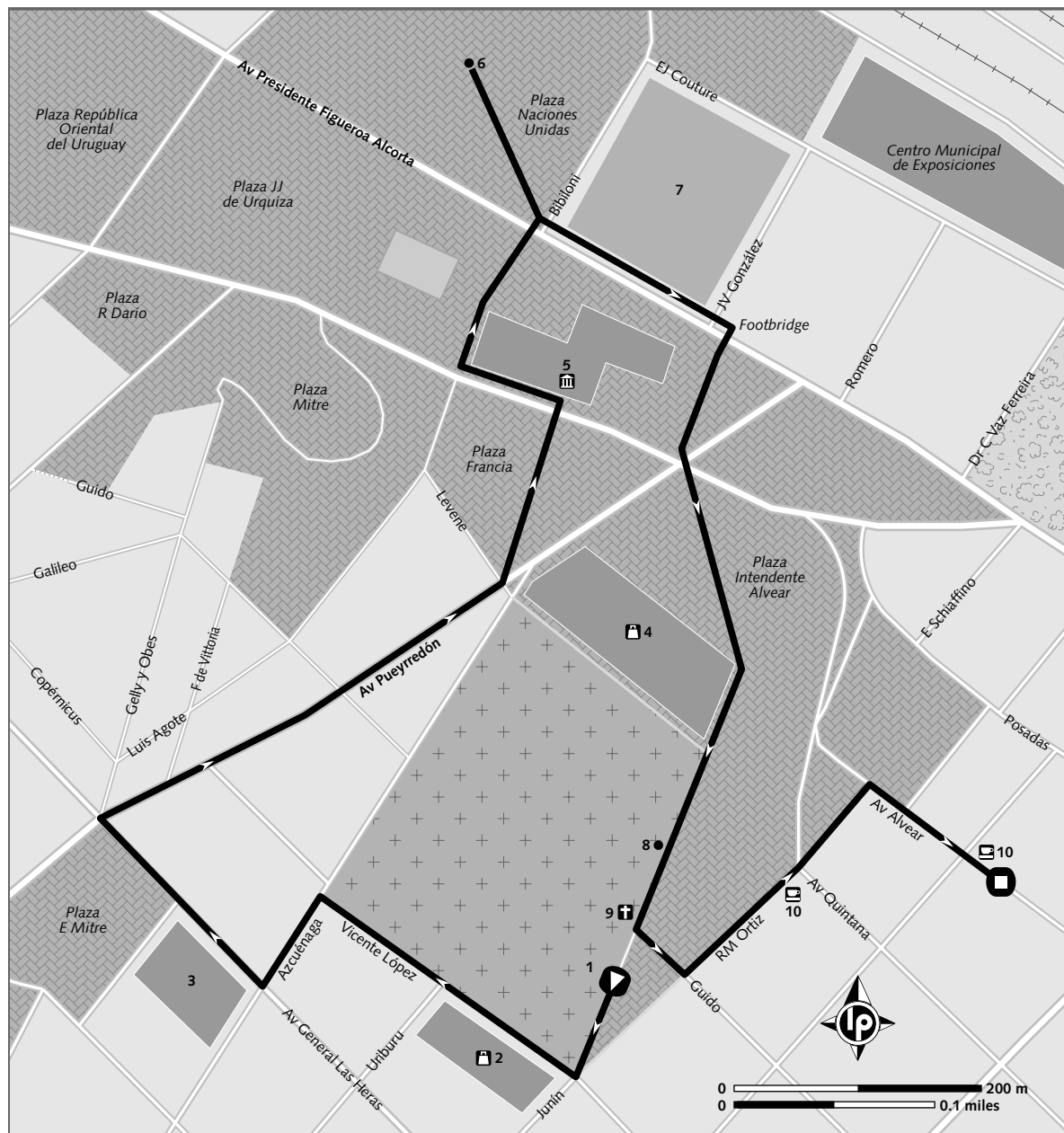
WALK FACTS

Start Recoleta Cemetery

Finish Alvear Palace Hotel

Distance 3km

Duration 3 hours



you're ready for the living again, come out and head south. Stroll by shopping mall **Village Recoleta (2)**, then turn left at Azcuénaga and go a block. At the intersection you'll see the **Facultad de Ingeniería (3)**, an engineering school and wonderfully Gothic statement. Follow Av General Las Heras a couple blocks, then turn right at Av Pueyrredón. Go north past the home-oriented mall **Buenos Aires Design (4)**; it's worth a look if you like home furnishings. Cut across Plaza Francia and head to the **Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes (5)**; p55), with its grand collection of classical art. Head behind the museum and carefully cross Av Presidente Figueroa Alcorta. Enter Plaza Naciones Unidas, where you'll see the giant metal flower sculpture **Floralis Genérica (6)**; at night the petals close like a real flower. Walk by the mammoth **Facultad de Derecho (7)**; law school), cross the footbridge and make your way back to Plaza Intendente Alvear; if it's a weekend you'll have a huge crafts market to explore (weekdays it's smaller). See what's up at the **Centro Cultural Recoleta (8)**; p48) and glance inside the pretty **Iglesia de Nuestra Señora de Pilar (9)**.

If it's a sunny warm day, grab an outdoor table at **La Biela café (10)**; p65); if it's cloudy, walk a couple blocks to the sumptuous **Alvear Palace Hotel (11)**, where a luxurious afternoon tea awaits.

COURSES

Language

It's official: BA is a hot destination for Spanish learners. There are plenty of schools and even more private teachers, so ask around for recommendations. All offer social excursions and can help with accommodation.

Prices for institutions listed here range from US\$110 to US\$190 per week for group lessons (four hours per day); private classes average US\$12 per hour. Check websites for specifics; also try www.123teachme.com, where students rate language schools.

Academia Buenos Aires (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4345-5954; www.academiabuenosaires.com; Hipólito Yrigoyen 571, 4th fl)

BA Spanish (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4381-2076; www.baspanish.com; Av Rivadavia 1559 2C)

Centro de Estudio del Español (Cedic; Map pp52-3; ☎ 4312-1016; www.cedic.com.ar; Reconquista 715, 11E)

Estudio Buenos Aires (EBA; Map pp52-3; ☎ 4312-8936; www.ebatrust.com; Reconquista 962, 3rd fl)

Ibero Spanish Argentina (Map pp52-3; www.iberospanish.com; ☎ 5218-0240; Uruguay 150)

Instituto de Lengua Española para Extranjeros

(ILEE; Map pp52-3; ☎ /fax 4782-7173; www.argentinalee.com; Av Callao 339, 3rd fl)

International Bureau of Language (IBL; Map pp52-3; ☎ 4331-4250; www.ibl.com.ar; Av Florida 165, 8th fl)

Tango

Tango classes are available everywhere – your own hostel may offer them. All *milongas* (dance halls) offer inexpensive classes. They can also put you in touch with private teachers, some of whom speak English. Cultural centers (see p48) often have affordable classes as well. Check tango magazines like *La Tanguata* or *BA Tango*, available at tourist offices, for more options; a good website is www.tangodata.com.ar.

Academia Nacional del Tango (Map pp52-3;

☎ 4345-6967; www.anacdeltango.org.ar; Av de Mayo 833) Cheap tango classes (US\$2) from 6pm to 8pm Monday to Friday.

Centro Cultural Torquato Tasso (Map p49; ☎ 4307-6506; Defensa 1575) Great San Telmo venue with US\$5 classes, free Sunday night *milongas*, and excellent shows (US\$6.50, Wednesday to Saturday).

Confitería Ideal (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4601-8234; Suipacha 384) One of BA's main tango meccas, with continuous classes (US\$5), frequent *milongas* (US\$3.25) and nightly shows (US\$5).

TOURS

If you have little time and want to take a tour, that's OK. Just avoid those big buses full of languid sightseers – much more creative tours exist.

Baires Bikes (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4300-5068; www.bairesbikes.com; Bolívar 762) Daily three-hour tours (US\$21) cover the city's major *barrios*. English-speaking guides; also rents bikes (per day US\$12).

Cicerones (☎ 4330-0800; www.cicerones.org.ar) Nonprofit organization that relies on volunteers to show visitors key parts of Buenos Aires. Tours go on foot or public transport.

Eternautas (☎ 4384-7874; www.eternautas.com) Economical weekend walking tours (US\$2); also tours with a political, artistic, social or historical bent (US\$25 and up). Guides speak various languages and are certified historians; custom tours available.

Gobierno de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires (☎ 4114-5791; www.bue.gov.ar/recorridos) Free guided tours of the city, including some with historical-figure themes (Evita, Gardel, Borges). Ask if English-speaking guides are available.

Urban Biking (☎ 4568-4321; www.urbanbiking.com) Offers similar services to Baires Bikes.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Buenos Aires' biggest celebrations:

Tango festival (www.festivaldetango.com.ar) Late February to early March.

Book fair (www.el-libro.com.ar) First three weeks of April.

Independent film festival (www.bafilmfest.com) Mid to late April.

Art festival (www.arteba.com) Mid-May.

Livestock fair (www.ruralarg.org.ar) July to August.

SLEEPING

Buenos Aires' *microcentro* is central and close to many sights and services, though it's busy and noisy during the day. San Telmo is about 15 minutes' walk south and good for those seeking old colonial atmosphere, cozy cobbled streets, proximity to many tango venues and a blue-collar flavor around the edges. Palermo Viejo is northwest of center and about a 10-minute taxi ride. It's a pretty area full of wonderful old buildings and dotted with the city's best ethnic restaurants, trendiest boutiques and liveliest bars.

Note that private rooms (and even dorm beds) in some hostels can cost more than rooms in a cheap hotel. All hostels listed here include kitchen access and light breakfast; most have free internet (some even wi-fi) and lockers (bring your own lock). The bigger ones offer many services and activities. Most hostels (especially smaller ones) don't take credit cards. To obtain a Hostelling International card (US\$14) head to BA's **Hostelling International office** (Map pp52-3; ☎ 451-8712; www.hostels.org.ar; Av Florida 835, 3rd fl, suite 319).

BA has some decent budget hotel choices. Most offer a simple breakfast and cable TV; a few take credit cards, which might incur a fee of up to 10% (be sure to ask).

City Center

Lime House (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4383-4561; www.limehouseargentina.com; Lima 11; dm US\$6-7, d US\$23, with shared bathroom US\$22; 📺) Funkier than most, this hostel offers busy atmosphere (music plays inside and 9 de Julio roars outside), rustic surroundings (could use a lick of paint), grungy kitchen and a pool room. Dorms range from four to 12 beds.

Milhouse (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4345-9604; www.milhousehostel.com; Hipólito Yrigoyen 959; dm with/without HI card US\$7.50/8.50, d with/without HI card US\$26/29; 📺 📺) Large, central and BA's premier 'party hostel.' Dorms are 4-8 beds (most with inside bath), doubles are beautiful, there are Monday night

DJ parties and plenty of activities are available. About 150 beds, with a nearby annex being built.

V&S Hostel Club (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4322-0994; www.argentinahostels.com; Viamonte 887; dm US\$8.50, s US\$26, d US\$29; 📺 📺) One of BA's best, this central hostel has a great atmosphere, good sex-segregated dorms (though some get large with triple bunks) and decent services. There's a small outdoor patio and tiny kitchen. The beautiful private rooms all have baths; reserve in advance.

Maípu (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4322-5142; Maípu 735; s/d US\$16/20, with shared bathroom US\$13/16) Grand old place with original tile work, high ceilings and dim lighting. Rooms are large, simple and reasonably kept up. Good central choice but don't expect any modern conveniences.

Hotel El Cabildo (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4322-6745; Lavalle 748; s/d US\$16/20) An unbeatable deal for its location, right on pedestrian Lavalle. Rooms are carpeted and good, and some are large. No breakfast.

Gran Hotel Oriental (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4951-6427; ghoriental@hotmail.com; Bartolomé Mitre 1840; s/d US\$16/20) Popular for its very pleasant, well-priced and modern rooms. They're remodeling, so prices may fluctuate. Reserve ahead.

Hotel Central Córdoba (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4311-1175; www.hotelcentralcordoba.com.ar; San Martín 1021; s/d US\$23/26; 📺) Good-value rooms are on tap at this downtown hotel, located within swilling distance of BA's two most popular bars. If you want to pass out on the satin bed sheets make sure you reserve ahead.

Goya Hotel (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4322-9269; www.goyahotel.com.ar; Suipacha 748; s/d from US\$29/39; 📺) A good, friendly choice with central location. Forty modern, comfortable and carpeted rooms; they're remodeling, so prices might increase. The 'presidential' suite (US\$58) comes with jets in the tub.

Also recommended:

Downtown Mate (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4381-0647; www.downtownmate.com.ar; Av Rivadavia 1181; dm US\$6-8, d US\$16; 📺) Nothing fancy, but cheap for its central location.

Alkimista (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4383-2267; www.alkimistahostel.com; Av de Mayo 1385, 2nd fl C; dm US\$6.50, s/d US\$11/16; 📺) In a high-rise building. Cramped rooms, but tall ceilings and some charm.

Hostel Clan (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4334-3401; www.hostelclan.com.ar; Addfoh Alsina 912; dm US\$7, d US\$18; 📺) Grungy, casual and loose sorta place, with a very social atmosphere.

Milonga (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4815-1827; www.milonga.com.ar; Ayacucho 921; dm US\$7-8.50, s/d US\$13/20; 📍) Old house with decent rooms facing outdoor hallways and patios; good common spaces. See also their annex, Milonga B&B.

BA Stop (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4382-7406; www.bastop.com; Av Rivadavia 1194; dm US\$7.50, s/d US\$12/15) Small, popular place with excellent location, comfortable common areas and good breakfast.

Portal del Sur (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4342-8788; www.portaldelurba.com.ar; Hipólito Yrigoyen 855; dm US\$9-10, s/d US\$23-30; 📍 📍) Clean, beautiful, gorgeous doubles and luxurious rooftop terrace. Good dorms.

San Telmo

Carlos Gardel (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4307-2606; www.hos.telcarlosgardel.com.ar; Carlos Calvo 579; dm US\$6-7, d US\$16-23; 📍) Reception is beautiful, with antiques and tango-theme decor. Rooms don't follow suit, but are decent; avoid the 10-bed dorm. There's a pleasant mezzanine dining area and tiny rooftop terrace. One small single available (US\$10).

Nomade (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4300-7641; www.hostel.nomade.com; Carlos Calvo 430; dm US\$6.50, d with shared bathroom US\$16; 📍) One block from Plaza Dorrego. Boasts large sunny terrace, pleasant patios, two basic doubles and cramped six-bed dorms. Its annex nearby has six doubles and a couple of dark, eight-bed dorms under a covered patio.

Hostal de Granados (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4362-5600; www.hostaldegranados.com.ar; Chile 374; dm US\$6.50-13, d US\$28-31, with shared bathroom US\$24; 📍 📍) On a café-filled street is this tall hostel (think stairs) with outdoor halls, large high-ceilinged rooms, dim kitchen and slick downstairs restaurant. Most rooms have a fridge; there's a small rooftop terrace. Lacks a cozy common room.

Hostel-Inn Tango City (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4300-5764; www.hostel-inn.com; Piedras 680; dm with/without HI card US\$7/8, d with/without HI card US\$22/27; 📍 📍) A large hostel in a tall, almost claustrophobic building with six floors (there's an elevator). Cramped rooms come with or without bath. The barlike area downstairs, complete with pool table and small kitchen, is good for chatting up fellow travelers.

Hostel-Inn Buenos Aires (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4300-7992; www.hostel-inn.com; Humberto Primo 820; dm with/without HI card US\$7/8, d with/without HI card US\$18/22; 📍 📍) Much cozier than its big brother four blocks north is this colorful hostel, also offering plenty of services. Small dorms have four

to six beds, doubles all share bathrooms and there's a pleasant sunny rooftop.

Hotel Carly (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4361-7710; www.hotelcarly.com.ar; Humberto Primo 466; s/d US\$7/11, with shared bathroom US\$6.50/9; 📍) This old standby continues to offer outstanding location and cheap but good basic rooms with high ceilings, open hallways and tiled patios. Ancient charm and funky kitchen.

Ostinatto (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4362-9639; www.ostinato.com.ar; Chile 680; dm US\$8-9, d US\$25, with shared bathroom US\$22, penthouse US\$39; 📍) Gorgeous new hostel with its own bar on the ground floor, Z-shaped dining room table and slick penthouse off the rooftop terrace. Free tango classes.

Brisas del Mar (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4300-0040; Humberto Primo 826; d US\$10-15) A variety of well-tended rooms, some with shared bathroom and/or carpet, are on offer at this quiet, family-run hotel. Also has tiled outdoor hallways and tiny limited-use kitchen.

Palermo Viejo

Tango Backpackers (Map pp56-7; ☎ 4776-6871; www.tangobp.com; Thames 2212; dm with/without HI card US\$6/7, d with/without HI card US\$16/19.50; 📍) Decent small HI hostel in a converted old house with grungy kitchen and sunny rooftop patio. Three blocks to Plaza Italia (metro and bus lines).

Casa Buenos Aires (Map pp56-7; ☎ 6341-9893; www.casabuenosaires.com.ar; Charcas 3912; dm/s US\$6.50/13, d US\$20-26; 📍) A plain, quiet and safe place that's best for long-term tenants. Not a party place at all and only offers 20 beds; its nearby annex is much more modern and attractive. Free bike rental; reservations required.

SPLURGE!

Bo Bo Hotel (Map pp56-7; ☎ 4774-0505; www.bobohotel.com; Guatemala 4882; r US\$70-130; 📍 📍 📍) One of the slickest boutique hotels in BA, offering up seven gorgeous rooms with minimalist lines, contemporary textures and rich color schemes. For something extra special shoot for the 'Minimalist' or 'Argentinean' (Jacuzzi!) rooms, both with their own private terrace. 'Racionalista' is wheelchair accessible. The restaurant downstairs offers some of Palermo Soho's finest fare, while other pluses include security box, room service and wi-fi. Wear your best threads to fit in, and remember to reserve at least one month in advance.

LONG-TERM STAYS

Heaps of long-term guesthouses and apartments have popped up in recent years to meet the demand from travelers and expats wanting to spend weeks or months (or years) in BA. Prices are higher than locals pay but these come furnished and often have an English-speaking manager. Also, there's no need to pay the 'guarantee' deposit that locals have to ante up when renting an apartment. Reserve in advance for any place listed here.

La Casa de Etty (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4384-6378; www.angelfire.com/pq/coret; Luis Sáenz Peña 617; r per person per month US\$80-225) Señora Esther Corcias offers three basic double-occupancy rooms in her house, all with shared bathroom and kitchen access. She also places tenants in other apartments and guesthouses; check website for more information.

Segura Homestay (Map pp52-3; ☎ 5139-0476; www.homestay-buenos-aires.com; Av Corrientes 1642, 4th fl, suite 87; s/d per week from US\$91/147, per month from US\$265/397) Just five simple but spacious rooms are on offer at this no-nonsense apartment, which is in a large building on bustling Av Corrientes. All rooms share bathrooms and there's a large bleak patio. Popular with Spanish students.

Casa de Plata (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4953-3950; www.casadeplata.com.ar; Av Corrientes 2092, 4th fl; s per week/month US\$110/330, d per person per week/month US\$85/250) Just five comfortable, carpeted rooms in an old house are available here; all share bathrooms and come with balcony. The decor is a bit eclectic, but overall atmosphere is good. Shared quadruple room also available (per person per week/month US\$60/180).

Casa Los Angelitos (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4954-4079; www.casalosangelitos.com; Hipólito Yrigoyen 2178; s/d per month from US\$270/400; 🚽) Located in a charming old house, with seven large comfortable rooms (two with private bathroom) and beautiful terraces. One room has kitchenette; one week minimum stay.

M&M Homestay (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4362-0356; magdalena@argentina.com; Balcarce 1094; s/d per day US\$16/33) Just two good rooms in a well-maintained, gorgeous old house in San Telmo (reserve well in advance!), but an annex will hold four more rooms. Tiny kitchen and rooftop terrace; friendly dog on premises.

These are a few of the many apartment websites available:

Apartmentsba.com (www.apartmentsba.com)

Craigslist (www.craigslist.com)

Friendly Apartments (www.friendlyapartments.com/apart.htm) Gay friendly.

My Space BA (www.myspaceba.com)

Piso Compartido (www.pisocompartido.com.ar)

Reynolds Propiedades (www.argentinahomes.com)

Roomargentina (www.roomargentina.com)

StayinBuenosAires (www.stayinbuenosaires.com)

Tu Casa Argentina (www.tucasargentina.com)

Your Home in Argentina (www.yourhomeinargentina.com.ar)

Chill House (Map pp56-7; ☎ 4861-0863; www.chillhouse.com.ar; José Antonio Cabrera 4056; dm US\$8, s/d with shared bathroom US\$18/22; 🚽) Laid-back hostel on the southern fringe of Palermo Viejo. Good for those who don't need luxury or many services, and who care more about party action. Music is always playing and French is spoken (the owners are international and into BA's nightlife). One double comes with private bathroom.

Casa Esmeralda (Map pp56-7; ☎ 4772-2446; www.casaesmeralda.com.ar; Honduras 5765; dm US\$8, d US\$21-25; 🚽) Peaceful spot with homey common spaces, pleasant garden, rooftop patio and friendly

dog. Good location in Palermo Hollywood (a subneighborhood of Palermo Viejo).

Milonga B&B (Map pp56-7; ☎ 4825-7217; www.milongabnb.com; Agüero 1389; dm/d US\$9/32, s/d with shared bathroom US\$19/27; 🚽) A good, intimate choice in a less 'trendy' part of Palermo Viejo. Has just nine rooms, mostly private ones, all in a pretty, remodeled old house. See website for monthly rates.

La Otra Orilla (Map pp56-7; ☎ 4867-4070; www.otraorilla.com.ar; J Alvarez 1779; r US\$30-85; 🚽 🚽) A gorgeous place located off the beaten path in Palermo Viejo. Just seven luxurious and romantic rooms are available in a beautiful

old house. There's a cute garden patio, and the service is friendly.

Cypress In (Map pp56-7; ☎ 4833-5834; www.cypressin.com; Costa Rica 4828; r US\$54-96; ♿ ♻️) Just eight small but comfortable and aesthetically pleasing rooms are available at this excellent guesthouse in Palermo Viejo. Common spaces are colorful and contemporary, with minimalist styling. Other pluses are pleasant patio, meeting rooms and range of professional services.

EATING

Buenos Aires is chock full of excellent food, and you'll dine very well whether you eat meat or not. Most restaurants serve a standard fare of *parrillada* (grilled meats), pastas and/or *minutas* (short orders), but in recent years a large number of more international and ethnic eateries have popped up in Palermo Viejo and nearby Las Cañitas. Another food-oriented neighborhood is Puerto Madero, but 90% of the restaurants here are very fancy, relatively expensive and lean more toward steaks than stir-fries.

Vegetarians rejoice: unlike the rest of Argentina, there is a good range of meat-free restaurants in BA – you just have to know where to look. Most restaurants will offer a few pastas, salads and pizzas – but not much else that's meat-free.

City Center

Pizzería Güerrín (Map pp52-3; Av Corrientes 1368; slices US\$75¢) Great for good, cheap pizza slices; eat standing up, like the penny-pinching locals, or sit down for a rest.

El Cuartito (Map pp52-3; Talcahuano 937; slices US\$75¢-US\$1.25) Another excellent, inexpensive stand-up pizzeria, and a BA institution. Great old sports posters.

Cocina Patora (Map pp52-3; San Martín 1141; mains under US\$3.50) Wonderfully cheap northern Argentine treats like *locro* (spicy meat stew), tamales, empanadas and *cazuelas* (meat or vegetable pot stews). Good modern atmosphere and a little paradise from busy San Martín.

La Esquina de las Flores (Map pp52-3; Av Córdoba 1587; meals under US\$4; ☎ 8:30am-8:30pm Mon-Fri, to 3pm Sat) BA's veggie haven, with dishes changing daily. Takeout available, plus a small store selling wheat breads, soy flour and organic mate.

Lotus (Map pp52-3; Av Córdoba 1577; meals under US\$4; ☎ 11:30am-6pm Mon-Fri) Next door to La Esquina, this vegetarian cafeteria also serves fresh and

healthy meals. Its store downstairs sells seitan, brown rice and lentils.

Cumaná (Map pp52-3; Rodríguez Peña 1149; mains under US\$4) Insanely popular for its low-priced pizzas, empanadas and *cazuelas*. Great rustic atmosphere – just get here early (you've been warned).

Parrilla al Carbón (Map pp52-3; Lavalle 663; mains under US\$4) For fast, cheap and tasty grilled meats in the city center you won't do much better than this small joint. Order a set meal (steak, fries and cola) for US\$4.25 or grab a *choripan* (sausage sandwich) for a ridiculous US\$75¢.

Filo (Map pp52-3; San Martín 975; mains US\$4-8) Wonderful hip and contemporary surroundings; there's an art gallery in the basement. Wide selection of salads, pizzas, pastas and desserts – all of it good.

Chiquilín (Map pp52-3; Montevideo 310; mains US\$4-9.50) A good choice for upscale pasta and *parrillada*. Dine under hanging hams and international flags; this place bustles even after midnight.

Also recommended:

Pippo (Map pp52-3; Paraná 356; mains US\$2.25-6) Cheap, casual and open late. There's another branch at Montevideo 341.

La Huerta (Map pp52-3; Lavalle 895; set menu US\$3.25; ☎ lunch Mon-Fri, dinner Fri & Sat) Vegetarian cafeteria.

Puerto Leyenda (Map pp52-3; Av Rivadavia 1119; set menu under US\$3.50) All you can eat.

El Patio (Map pp52-3; Av Florida btwn Lavalle & Tucumán; meals under US\$4; ☎ lunch Mon-Fri) Food court.

Galerías Pacífico (Map pp52-3; cnr Avs Florida & Córdoba; meals under US\$4) Food court downstairs.

Grant's (Map pp52-3; Junín 1155; set menu US\$4.25-6) All you can eat. There's another branch at Ave General Las Heras 1925.

El Sanjuanino (Map pp52-3; Posadas 1515; meals under US\$5) Cheap Recoleta eats – *locro*, tamales and empanadas.

Granix (Map pp52-3; Av Florida 165; meals US\$5.25; ☎ lunch Mon-Fri) Fancy veg cafeteria; on first floor in Galería Güemes.

San Telmo

La Vieja Rotisserie (Map pp52-3; Defensa 963; mains US\$2.25-4) Hopelessly stuffed on Sunday afternoons, this cheap *parrilla* offers classic atmosphere, tango tunes and excellent meats.

El Desnivel (Map pp52-3; Defensa 855; mains US\$2.75-6.50) Popularity has driven prices up some, but it's still worth a visit. The *vacío* (flank steak) is nice and tender – ask for it *bien jugoso* (rare) if you dare.

Las Marías (Map pp52-3; Bolívar 949; mains US\$3.25-6.50) Good old standby, with traditional surroundings, tasty *parrillada* and homemade pastas. Unpretentious.

La Farmacia (Map pp52-3; Bolívar 898; mains US\$5-7) ☎ closed Mon-Fri lunch) Great wall art accompanies creative cuisine at this fun eatery. Sit on the rooftop terrace if it's warm, or inside the old house for a more cozy atmosphere.

Palermo Viejo

Oui Oui (Map pp56-7; Nicaragua 6068; sandwiches under US\$3) Cute as a bug, this small French bistro comes pretty close to authenticity. It serves delicious pastries, gourmet salads and outstanding sandwiches. Weekend brunch is awesome, but come early – it's popular.

Mark's Deli & Coffeehouse (Map pp56-7; El Salvador 4701; mains US\$3-4) This is a modern eatery that cooks up excellent soups, salads and sandwiches. Cool modern decor, pleasant outside seating and a guaranteed wait on sunny weekends.

Bangalore (Map pp56-7; ☎ 4779-2621; Humboldt 1416; mains US\$3.25-7) Mainly a pub, but upstairs there's a small space with just a few tables. Indian food is the name of the game: choose the pumpkin curry, beef vindaloo, chicken Madras or Saag Aloo.

Krishna (Map pp56-7; Malabia 1833; mains under US\$4; ☎ lunch & dinner Wed-Sun, lunch Tue) A tiny place full of Indian drapes and colorful mosaic tables. Wash down your *thalis*, tofu and seitan with a lassi and chai tea.

Lo de Jesus (Map pp56-7; ☎ 4831-1961; Gurruchaga 1406; mains US\$4-7) Wonderful corner restaurant with white tablecloth-covered tables (including on the sidewalk) and suited-up wait staff. Grills up outstanding *parrillada* (try the *ojo de bife* – that's ribeye) and pastas.

El Trapiche (Map pp56-7; Paraguay 5099; mains US\$5-9) A bit more traditional than most Palermo Viejo eateries, this large modern restaurant serves an exceptional range of pastas, salads and – most importantly for meat-lovers – awesome *parrillada*. Try the house specialty, the *lomo* (tenderloin).

Bo Bo (Map pp56-7; Guatemala 4882; mains US\$6-8) This snazzy minimalist restaurant offers gorgeously presented international cuisine. Try the squash and goat cheese *sorrentinos* (large raviolis) in artichoke pesto, or the stuffed rabbit in port sauce with sautéed mushrooms.

Bar Uriarte (Map pp56-7; ☎ 4834-6004; Uriarte 1572; mains US\$7-9) This is yet another slick modern

SPLURGE!

La Cabrera (Map pp56-7; ☎ 4831-7002; JA Cabrera 5099; mains US\$6.50-9) If you eat at only one steakhouse in BA, make it this one. Some of the city's best meats are professionally grilled up and presented to you on wood boards and in huge portions, along with a few dainty condiments (olives, sun-dried tomatoes, goat's cheese) on the side. The ambience is less sniffy than most other Palermo Viejo eateries, yet still elegant. It's very popular, but there's a nearby annex to ease your wait.

eatery serving excellent food. The emphasis at Bar Uriarte is on a limited menu graced with Mediterranean-influenced dishes, but there's also an adobe oven in back for pizza. Try the US\$4.50 lunch deal.

Also recommended:

Club Eros (Map pp56-7; Uriarte 1609; mains under US\$3) Dirt cheap local club that's stuffed with diners.

Bio (Map pp56-7; Humboldt 2199; mains under US\$5; ☎ closed Sun & Mon nights) Small corner joint serving tasty and original veg fare.

Las Cholas (Map pp56-7; ☎ 4899-0094; Arce 306; mains under US\$5) Cheap northern Argentine food in hip Las Cañitas. Upscale rustic and very popular.

Novecento (Map pp56-7; ☎ 4778-1900; Av Báez 199; mains US\$5.25-10) Gourmet pastas, meats, fish and salads. Fancy corner bistro in Las Cañitas.

Sudestada (Map pp56-7; ☎ 4776-3777; Guatemala 5602; mains US\$7-10) Magnificent Southeast Asian dishes; make reservations and try the duck.

Olsen (Map pp56-7; ☎ 4776-7677; Gorriti 5870; mains US\$8.50-13) Gorgeous spaces, luscious food, high prices.

DRINKING

BA is all about the night, and there are plenty of cafés, bars and live-music venues in which to drink the night away. Cafés have very long hours: they're often open morning to late night. Bars and live-music venues open late and stay open even later; on weekends they'll often be hopping until 6am the next day.

Cafés

Buenos Aires has a heavy café culture, which is obvious once you notice the number of cafés in the city. Some are famous institutions, full of elegant old atmosphere and rich history. *Porteños* will spend hours solving the world's

problems over a few *medialunas* (croissants) and a *cortado*. Many offer full menus too.

Bar Plaza Dorrego (Map pp52-3; Defensa 1098) One of San Telmo's most atmospheric cafés, smack on Plaza Dorrego. The dark wood surroundings (check out the graffiti) and old-world ambience can't be beaten, and on weekends this place buzzes to the hilt.

Café Tortoni (Map pp52-3; Av de Mayo 829) The Cadillac of BA's cafés, the well-known Tortoni takes you back in time with charming old atmosphere – though its self-promoting souvenir counter is a sign of recent times. Nightly tango shows (US\$8; see p68).

Richmond (Map pp52-3; Av Florida 468) Take a java break from Av Florida's hustle and bustle at this elegant café. Plenty of coffees, snacks, meals and cocktails grace the menu. The Richmond was a popular meeting point for BA's famous writers, including Borges.

La Biela (Map pp52-3; Av Quintana 600) The upper-crust elite dawdle for hours at this classy joint in Recoleta. Prices are relatively expensive, and the outside seating menu costs even more – but it's simply irresistible on a warm sunny day, especially on weekends.

Clasica y Moderna (Map pp52-3; Av Callao 892) Classic, cozy café with heavy bohemian vibe. These brick walls have seen famous poets, philosophers, singers and musicians come and go. Artsy bookstore inside, otherwise there's usually a newspaper or two.

Los 36 Billares (Map pp52-3; Av de Mayo 1265) Another long-running spot on Av de Mayo, with wood details and classic surroundings. It's popular as a billiards hall, with plenty of tables and occasional competitions. Tango, folkloric music and even belly-dancing shows take place in the evenings.

Bars

Palermo Viejo has BA's highest concentration of trendy and popular bars, though there are a few good ones downtown and in San Telmo as well. *Porteños* aren't big drinkers and getting smashed is generally frowned upon. For cheap thrills, buy some bottles of brew and hang out with the masses in Plaza Serrano (Palermo Viejo) on a weekend night.

Gibraltar (Map pp52-3; Perú 895) One of BA's most popular expat pubs that also attracts heady mix of backpackers and locals. Good, unpretentious atmosphere; serves tasty international foods like beef and ale pie, green Thai curry and Caesar salad. Plenty of whiskeys.

Milión (Map pp52-3; Paraná 1048) Bar-restaurant located in a richly renovated old mansion. The drinking happens on the 2nd and 3rd floors, in the small rooms with high ceilings. Loud, smoky and very popular. Nice terrace overlooking leafy garden.

Gran Bar Danzón (Map pp52-3; Libertad 1161) Trendy and upscale restaurant-wine bar with good selection of wines by the glass. Asian-inspired dinner selections. Very popular, so come early for happy hour and snag a good seat on the sofas. Live jazz Thursday and Friday.

Acabar (Map pp56-7; Honduras 5733) Among BA's most eclectic bar-restaurants. Flowery and colorful 'anything goes' decor, board games for everyone and good music keeps this large place packed with fun-seekers. Calmer on weeknights.

Congo (Map pp56-7; Honduras 5329) A great Palermo Viejo drinking den. Mellow yet superhip, and playing some of the best music in town. Check out the sultry back garden and sip an exotic cocktail or two – they're really good.

Mundo Bizarro (Map pp56-7; Guatemala 4802) Cool Palermo Soho watering hole, complete with retro booths, rockabilly music and potent potions. Food ranges from sushi to Tex-Mex; come early if you want a good seat.

Unico (Map pp56-7; Honduras 5604) Crazy popular, this Palermo Hollywood corner bar has a shortage of tables even on weekday nights (come early). Good music, airy sidewalk tables, heady drinks and cozy atmosphere help, plus it's a great place to be seen.

Janio (Map pp56-7; Malabia 1805) Snazzy corner bar-restaurant in Palermo Soho. Several floors high, with covered terrace at the top. The catwalks inside are interesting but the sidewalk tables are the highlight on a balmy summer night. Music gets progressively louder as the night wears on.

Kilkenny (Map pp52-3; Marcelo T de Alvear 399) BA's most famous Irish pub. Fashionable with businesspeople on weekdays after work, and crammed full of everyone else on weekend nights. Good dark, smoky atmosphere, but too popular for its own good.

Druid In (Map pp52-3; Reconquista 1040) Half a block from Kilkenny and much cozier. Offers classic Irish pub fare (steak and kidney pie, Irish stew) and live Celtic music on Fridays and Saturdays.

Le Cigale (Map pp52-3; 25 de Mayo 722) Hip and moody downtown lounge with retro atmosphere and good cocktails; especially popular

for its Tuesday night DJ spins. Good party crowds on weeknights, when tables are supremely hard to find.

Deep Blue (Map pp52-3; Ayacucho 1240) This is by far the best place for slick billiards action. Corrugated-steel ceilings, a dozen blue-felted pool tables and DJ house music Thursday to Saturday. Plus, get a personal beer tap at your table. Smaller branch at Reconquista 920 (Map pp52-3).

Doctor Mason (Map pp56-7; Aráoz 1199) Fancy corner joint that pours on the microbrews, including some of Argentina's best. Also bottled Guinness, Isenbeck and Duvel. Good creative cuisine, and check out the pool tables downstairs.

Van Koning (Map pp56-7; Av Báez 325) Best pub to quench your thirst in trendy Las Cañitas. Comes with fun, medieval, nautical Dutch-themed details. Three bars lurk among the dark, cozy spaces and multilevels; popular with expats.

ENTERTAINMENT

Buenos Aires never sleeps, so you'll find something to do every night of the week. There are continuous theater and musical performances, and tango shows are everywhere. On weekends (and even some weeknights) the nightclubs shift into high gear.

Every modern shopping center has its multiscreen cinema complex; most movies are shown in their original language, with subtitles. Check the *Buenos Aires Herald* for screening times.

Discount ticket vendors (for select theater, tango and movie performances) include **Cartelera Veá Más** (Map pp52-3; ☎ 6320-5319; Av Corrientes 1660, suite 2) and **Cartelera Baires** (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4372-5058, Av Corrientes 1382). **Ticketek** (☎ 5237-7200; www.ticketek.com.ar) has outlets throughout the city and sells tickets for large venues.

Classical Music & Performing Arts

Av Corrientes, between 9 de Julio and Av Calao, is Buenos Aires' answer to Broadway.

Teatro Colón (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4378-7133; www.teatrolon.org.ar; cnr Tucumán & Cerrito) The capital's most prestigious performing-arts venue is richly opulent and an excellent place to see opera, ballet, theatre and classical music. Some events are surprisingly affordable, though foreigners pay double for higher end tickets.

Teatro General San Martín (Map pp52-3; ☎ 0800-333-5254; www.teatrosanmartin.com.ar; Av Corrientes 1530)

Inexpensive shows and events (half-price on Wednesdays) are on offer here, but practically all are in Spanish. Several auditoriums and galleries.

Luna Park (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4311-5100; www.luna.park.com.ar; cnr Av Corrientes & Bouchard) Takes up a whole city block and serves as a venue for operas, dances, rock concerts, sporting gigs or any other large event. Check their website for schedules.

Nightclubs

Buenos Aires is all about the night, and clubbing is no exception. The action doesn't even start until after 2am, and the later the better. Those in the know take a nap before dinner, then stay up 'til the early morning light – or even until noon the next day!

In December 2004 a fire at the República Cromañón club claimed 194 lives. New regulations were swiftly slapped into place, closing some places down for good. Others have since reopened, but are presently prohibited from allowing dancing or live music. As clubs adapt changes will keep occurring, so ask where the hottest nightspots are during your stay.

Asia de Cuba (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4894-1328; Dealessi 750; ☎ Wed-Sat) By day it's a restaurant, but at night Asia de Cuba becomes one of BA's slickest clubs. The location is pretty darn romantic, and the exotic dockside lounges don't hurt. Dress well and look important. Best on Wednesdays.

Bahreïn (Map pp52-3; ☎ 44315-2403; Lavalle 345; ☎ Tue, Wed, Fri & Sat) On Tuesdays this popular downtown spot offers up the best drum'n'bass in town, but weekends rock just as good. Multifloors, chill-out spaces and eclectic decor add to the cool-vibe mix. The beats get faster as the night wears on.

Club Niceto (Map pp56-7; ☎ 4779-9396; Niceto Vega 5510) One of BA's biggest crowd pullers. Best on Thursday nights, when theater company Club 69 takes over and puts on a raucous transvestite show that's popular with both the straight and the gay. Plenty of blue spotlights and dry ice add atmosphere.

Maluco Beleza (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4372-1737; Sarmiento 1728; ☎ Wed, Fri-Sun) Located in an old mansion, this Brazilian magnet draws in long lines of hip-wigglers. Latin beats and lithe stage dancers stir up excitement, but you can always head upstairs for more intimate spaces. Especially good on Sundays.

Mint (Map pp56-7; ☎ 4806-8002; cnr Costanera Norte & Sarmiento; 📅 Wed-Sat) A huge, popular club out by the Costanera Norte. Known for its techno on Fridays, when big-name DJs bring in the crowds of sniffy twenty-somethings. Other nights see a mix of house and hip-hop. Great riverside lounges.

Opera Bay (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4315-8666; Grierson 225; 📅 Wed-Sat) Beautiful by day or night, this huge waterside club looks like a flattened Sydney Opera House. Plenty of bars and terraces make getting a drink and fresh air easy – great for those more interested in smooching than dancing. Come on Fridays.

Pachá (Map pp56-7; ☎ 4788-4280; Av Costanera Norte; 📅 Fri & Sat) Famous international guest DJs spin tunes for spruced-up and sniffy clientele at this huge, riverside mecca. It's a younger crowd on Fridays, and on Saturdays techno beats take over. Lines outside are long, so try to get a VIP invite. It's near Av La Pampa.

Live Music

Some bars have live music, though recent fire regulations may have affected schedules. For classical music and tango shows, see opposite and p68.

Notorious (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4815-8473; www.notorious.com.ar; Av Callao 966) Small place with great intimate feel, and one of BA's premier venues for live jazz music (almost nightly; Saturdays it's bossa nova). Dinner available; up front is a CD shop where you can listen before buying.

Club de Vino (Map pp56-7; ☎ 4833-0049; Cabrera 4737) Classy Palermo Viejo complex boasting a romantic restaurant, fancy bar, 180-seat music hall, wine shop and even small wine museum. Excellent for fine jazz, folklore and tango performances. Good wines (of course) and cheese platters too.

La Trastienda (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4342-7650; www.latrastienda.com; Balcarce 460) International acts specializing in salsa, merengue, blues, Latin pop

GAY & LESBIAN BUENOS AIRES

Buenos Aires is now South America's top gay destination, and offers a vibrant range of gay bars, cafés and clubs. You'll have to know where to look, however; despite general tolerance for homosexuality, this ain't SF or Sydney yet. BA's lesbian scene also definitely exists, though it's not nearly as overt as the boys'.

Look up current sweetheart spots in free booklets such as *La Otra Guía*, *The Ronda* and *Queer*, available at gay destinations. Magazines such as *NX* and *Imperio G* can be bought at newsstands. A lively nighttime cruising area is around Avs Santa Fe and Pueyrredón, where discount admission coupons are handed out on street corners.

Good websites are www.thegayguide.com.ar and gaybuenosaires.blogspot.com. For travel details there's **Pride Travel** (Map pp52-3; ☎ 5218-6556; www.pride-travel.com; Paraguay 523, 2E). The website www.friendlyapartments.ar specializes in renting to gay visitors, or try the San Telmo B&B **Lugar Gay** (☎ 4300-4747; www.lugargay.org; Defensa 1120; s US\$35-45, d US\$45-65).

In November there's a gay and lesbian **cinifest** (www.diversafilms.com.ar) as well as a **gay pride parade** (Marcha del Orgullo Gay; www.marchadelorgullo.org.ar). Looks like gay pride has arrived in Buenos Aires, and is here to stay.

Popular gay nightspots:

Amerika (Map pp56-7; ☎ 4865-4416; Gascón 1040; 📅 Fri-Sun) All-you-can-drink madness; large crowds, dark corners and thumping music.

Bach Bar (Map pp56-7; JA Cabrera 4390; 📅 Tue-Sun) Rowdy fun, especially for lesbians. Intimate and packed, with occasional stripper shows. Best Fridays and Saturdays.

Contramano (Map pp52-3; Rodríguez Peña 1082; 📅 Wed-Sun) One of BA's oldest gay venues, catering to older gay men. Trannie shows and raffle on Sundays.

Glam (Map pp56-7; JA Cabrera 3046; 📅 Thu-Sat) A fun gay club in a big old mansion. Plenty of lounges, bars and pretty boys. Come on Thursday and Saturday.

Sitges (Map pp56-7; ☎ 4861-3763; Av Córdoba 4119; 📅 Fri-Sun) A big checkout scene for both girls and boys, with karaoke on Sunday. Loud but good.

Palacio Alsina (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4331-1277; Adolfo Alsina 934; 📅 Thu-Sun) Palatial like a fairy tale, with hot dancers and packed floor. Friday and Sunday are mostly gay, while Thursday and Saturday are mixed.

For Club 69 see Club Niceto (opposite).

and tango play at this large venue (400 seats plus 1000 standing room), but rock rules the roost. Big names like Pericos, Café Tacuba and Yo La Tengo have jammed here; check website for schedules.

La Peña del Colorado (Map pp56-7; ☎ 4822-1038; Güemes 3657) Wonderfully local music venue, complete with guitar-strumming clientele, nightly folk shows and plenty of smoky air. Plus northern Argentine food specialties like spicy empanadas, *locro* and *humitas de Chala* (like tamales).

El Samovar de Rasputín (Map p49; ☎ 4302-3190; Del Valle Iberlucea 1251) Supremely funky blues joint at the heart of touristy La Boca. Run by eccentric, ex-hippie Napo, who's met the likes of Mick Jagger, Taj Mahal and Eric Clapton (not to mention Pavarotti). Live weekend blues.

Sports

If you're lucky enough to witness a *fútbol* match, you'll encounter a passion unrivaled in any other sport. The most popular teams are **Boca Juniors** (Map p49; ☎ 4362-2260; www.bocajuniors.com.ar; Brandsen 805) in La Boca and **River Plate** (☎ 4788-1200; www.carp.org.ar; Alcorta 7597) in Belgrano, northwest of Aeroparque Jorge Newberry.

Ticket prices ultimately depend on the teams playing and the demand. In general, however, *entradas populares* (bleachers) are the cheapest seats (US\$6.50 to US\$8) and attract the more emotional fans of the game; don't show any signs of wealth in this section, including watches, necklaces or fancy cameras. *Plateas* (fixed seats) cost US\$10 to US\$30.

If you don't want to go by yourself, join a tour with **Tangol** (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4312-7276; www.tangol.com; Av Florida 971, suite 31), which charges US\$36 for a ticket, hotel transfers and tour guide. For more information on *fútbol* in Argentina see www.afa.org.ar.

Polo is most popular from October through December at Campo de Polo in Palermo. Rugby, horseracing and *pato* (a traditional Argentine game played on horseback) are also spectating possibilities.

Tango Shows

Most travelers will want to take in a tango show in BA, as they should. It's a bit futile to look for 'nontouristy' shows, however, since basically all tango shows are geared toward tourists in one way or another. If you want less sensationalism, then look for cheaper shows; they'll tend to be more traditional. *Milongas*

(dance halls, or the dances themselves) are where *tanguistas* strut their stuff, but spectators don't really belong there.

There are 'free' (donation) street tango shows on Sunday at San Telmo's antiques fair (p51). Some restaurants in BA (especially in San Telmo and La Boca) offer free tango shows, but you have to eat or drink something there.

Café Homero (Map pp56-7; ☎ 4701-7357; JA Cabrera 4946; shows US\$5) In Palermo Hollywood, this perfectly sized venue has good inexpensive shows – but you'll need to consume something. Call for reservations.

Café Tortoni (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4342-4328; www.café.tortoni.com.ar; Av de Mayo 825; shows US\$8) Good, inexpensive tango in the back of an old café. Shows run twice nightly; also see p65.

Centro Cultural Torquato Tasso (Map p49; ☎ 4307-6506; www.tangotasso.com; Defensa 1575; shows US\$6.50) Excellent San Telmo venue with good shows (Wednesday to Saturday). See also p59.

Club de Vino (Map pp56-7; ☎ 4833-8330; JA Cabrera 4737; shows US\$7-12) Upscale Palermo Hollywood venue with live tango music and singers only (no dancers). Friday and Saturday nights; call for reservations.

Confitería Ideal (Map pp52-3; ☎ Suipacha 384; shows US\$5) A Buenos Aires institution that offers cheap nightly shows. See also p59.

El Balcón (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4362-2354; Humberto Primo 461) Free tango shows from Friday to Sunday at 9pm, but you have to eat here.

Mitos Argentinos (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4362-7810; www.mitosargentinos.com.ar; Humberto Primo 489) Live rock music on Friday and Saturday nights, but on Sundays offers tango classes and shows all afternoon.

These touristy, sensational dinner-tango shows (BA is full of them) are oriented at wealthy tourists. Many have a Las Vegas-like feel, and often involve costume changes, dry ice and plenty of high kicks. Reservations are crucial.

Bar Sur (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4362-6086; Estados Unidos 299; dinner show US\$44, show only US\$31) Intimate venue, just a dozen small tables.

Complejo Tango (Map p49; ☎ 4308-3242; www.complejotango.com.ar; Av Belgrano 2608; dinner show US\$58, show only US\$42) Includes a group tango class.

El Querandí (Map pp52-3; ☎ 5199-1770; www.querandi.com.ar; Perú 302; dinner show US\$63, show only US\$47) Also a restaurant.

Taconeando (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4307-6696; www.taconeando.com; Balcarce 725; dinner show US\$36, show only US\$26) About 130 seats.

SHOPPING

If you earn hard currency, Buenos Aires is a good place to spend money. The city is full of modern shopping malls, along with long, flashy store-lined streets like Avs Florida and Santa Fe. You'll find decent-quality clothes, leather, accessories, electronics, music and homewares, but anything imported (like electronics) will be very expensive.

Palermo Viejo is the best neighborhood for boutiques and creative fashions. Av Alvear, toward the Recoleta cemetery, means Gucci and Armani. Defensa in San Telmo is full of pricey antique shops. There are several weekend crafts markets such as the hippy *feria artesanal* in front of Recoleta's cemetery (p55). The famous San Telmo antiques fair (p51) takes place on Sunday (on Saturdays there's an artsy fair). For cheap third-world imports head to Av Pueyrredón near Once train station (Estación Once; Map pp52-3); you can find just about anything there.

Feria de Mataderos (www.feriademataderos.com.ar; cnr Av de los Corrales & Lisandro de la Torre) Way out west in the Mataderos *barrio* is this exceptional street market. People flock here for the cheap *asado*, good craft market, traditional folk dances and *gauchos* on horseback. Open Saturdays (6pm to midnight) from January to March, and Sundays (11am to 8pm) the rest of the year; call for exact dates. Buses 180 and 155 get you there in about an hour.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Most international flights leave from **Ezeiza** (Map p49; ☎ 5480-6111; www.aa2000.com.ar). **Manuel Tienda León** (MTL; Map pp52-3; ☎ 4314-3636; www.tiendaleon.com; cnr Av Eduardo Madero & San Martín) runs frequent shuttles to/from Ezeiza (US\$8, 40 minutes). Penny-pinchers can take bus 86 (US75¢, 1½ hours). Taxis cost around US\$18, including tolls.

MTL charges US\$3 for the 15-minute ride to Aeroparque. Or take city bus 45 from Plaza San Martín (US30¢). Taxis cost around US\$5.

Argentina's departure tax is US\$18, payable in US dollars or pesos. The following is a list of airline offices:

Aerolíneas Argentinas/Austral (Map pp52-3; ☎ 0810-222-86527; www.aerolineasargentinas.com; Av Leandro N Alem 1134) Another branch at Perú 2.
Air Canada (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4393-9090; www.aircanada.com; Av Córdoba 656)

Air France (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4317-4700; www.airfrance.com; San Martín 344, 23rd fl)

Alitalia (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4310-9999; www.alitalia.com; Av Santa Fe 887)

American Airlines (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4318-1111; www.aa.com; Av Santa Fe 881)

British Airways (Map pp52-3; ☎ 0800-666-1459; www.britishairways.com; Av del Libertador 498, 13th fl)

Delta (Map pp52-3; ☎ 0800-666-0133; www.delta.com; Av Santa Fe 887)

KLM (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4317-4700; San Martín 344, 23rd fl)

LADE (Map pp52-3; ☎ 0810-810-5233; Perú 714)

Lan (Map pp52-3; ☎ 0800-999-9526; Cerrito 866)

Lloyd Aéreo Boliviano (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4323-1900; www.labairlines.com.bo; Carlos Pellegrini 141)

Lufthansa (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4319-0600; Marcelo T de Alvear 590, 6th fl)

Pluna (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4120-0530; Av Florida 1)

Swissair (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4319-0000; Av Santa Fe 846, 1st fl)

Transportes Aéreos de Mercosur (TAM; Map pp52-3; ☎ 0800-333-3333; www.tam.com.ar; Cerrito 1026)

United Airlines (Map pp52-3; ☎ 0-810-777-864833; Av Eduardo Madero 9000)

Varig (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4329-9211; Av Córdoba 972, 3rd fl)

Boat

Buquebus (Ferrylineas; Map pp52-3; ☎ 4316-6500; www.buquebus.com; cnr Avs Antártida Argentina & Córdoba) offers several daily ferries to Colonia via a fast boat (US\$18, one hour) or slow boat (US\$31, three hours). It also goes to Montevideo (US\$53, three hours) and has seasonally available boat-bus services to Punta del Este, Uruguay's top beach resort. Buquebus has other offices at Av Córdoba 879 (Map pp52-3) and in Recoleta's Patio Bullrich mall. More services and higher prices exist in the summer season.

GETTING TO URUGUAY

Traveling from Buenos Aires into Uruguay is fairly straightforward, and you can see charming Colonia Del Sacramento (p955) in a day (Montevideo, the capital, takes longer). Nationals of Western Europe, the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand don't need a visa, though it's wise to check the current situation during your tenure.

Uruguay's unit of currency is the peso, but US dollars and Argentine pesos are widely accepted for tourist services.

when it's a good idea to buy your ticket an hour or two in advance. Some nationalities may need visas to enter Uruguay.

Bus

Retiro (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4310-0700; cnr Avs Antártida Argentina & Ramos Mejía) is a huge three-story bus station with slots for 75 buses. Inside are cafeterias, shops, bathrooms, luggage storage, telephone offices with internet and a 24-hour information kiosk. There's also a **tourist information office** (suite L83; ☎ 7:30am-1pm Mon-Sat); look for it under bus counter 105.

The following list is a small sample of very extensive services. Prices will vary widely depending on the season, the company and the economy. During holidays prices rise; buy your ticket in advance.

Domestic destinations:

Destination	Duration (hr)	Cost (US\$)
Bahía Blanca	9	18
Bariloche	22	33
Comodoro Rivadavia	26	57
Córdoba	10	18
Guaquaychú	4	8
Mar del Plata	6	13
Mendoza	15	31
Neuquén	18	24
Puerto Iguazú	17	39
Puerto Madryn	28	42
Resistencia	13	25
Rosario	4	8
Salta	21	44
San Martín de los Andes	20	40
Santa Rosa	9	15
Tucumán	16	34

International destinations:

Destination	Duration (hr)	Cost (US\$)
Asunción, Paraguay	18	26
Foz do Iguazú, Brazil	19	43
Lima, Peru	3 days	135
Montevideo, Uruguay	8	26
Punta del Este, Uruguay	10	33
Rio de Janeiro, Brazil	44	97
Santiago, Chile	20	50
São Paulo, Brazil	34	76

Train

With very few exceptions, rail travel in Argentina is limited to Buenos Aires' suburbs and

provincial cities. It's cheaper but not nearly as fast, frequent or comfortable as hopping on a bus.

Each of BA's train stations has its own Subte stop.

Estación Constitución (Map p49; ☎ 4018-0719, 4305-5577) Services to La Plata, Bahía Blanca, Atlantic beach towns.

Estación Once (Map p49; ☎ 4861-0043, 4317-4400) Services to Luján, Bahía Blanca, Atlantic beach towns.

Estación Retiro (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4317-4400) Services to Tigre, Rosario.

GETTING AROUND

Bicycle

Buenos Aires has several companies that offer guided bike tours to select destinations (see p59). They also rent out bikes, but be aware that downtown motor vehicles in this city consider bikes a pest – and very low on the traffic totem pole. If you must, ride bikes in safer neighborhoods like San Telmo and Palermo (both with some cobbled streets) or Puerto Madero and the nearby Reserva Ecológica Costanera Sur. And if you want to live another day to eat another steak, ride defensively!

Bus

Sold at many kiosks, the Guia T (pocket version US75¢) details some 200 bus routes. Fares depend on the distance, but most rides are US30¢; say 'ochenta' to the driver, then place coins in the machine behind him (change given). Offer front seats to elderly passengers.

Car & Motorcycle

We don't recommend you rent a car to drive around Buenos Aires. *Porteño* drivers turn crazy behind the wheel and you shouldn't compete with them. Also, public transport is excellent. Cars are good to explore the countryside, however. Try **Avis** (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4326-5542; www.avis.com; Cerrito 1527), **New Way** (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4515-0331; www.new-wayrentacar.com.ar; Marcella T de Alvear 773) or **Hertz** (Map pp52-3; ☎ 4816-8001; www.hertz.com.ar; Paraguay 1138).

For motorcycle rentals see **Motocare** (Map p49; ☎ 4782-1500; www.motocare.com.ar/rental; Av del Libertador 6588).

Subway

Buenos Aires' Subte (www.metrovias.com.ar) is fast, efficient and costs only US25¢ per ride. Four

of the five lines (Líneas A, B, D and E) run from the *microcentro* to the capital's western and northern outskirts, while Línea C links Estación Retiro and Constitución. A new H line is due to open in 2007, eventually connecting Estación Once with Retiro.

Trains operate from approximately 5am to 10:30pm except Sunday and holidays (when hours are 8am to 10pm); they run frequently on weekdays, less so on weekends.

Taxi & Remise

Black-and-yellow cabs are very common and reasonably priced. Meters start at around US75¢; tips are unnecessary, but leaving extra change is appreciated. If you're taking a taxi into town from Ezeiza airport, head to the city taxi counter, just behind the first row of transport booths. Don't just go with any driver.

Many people might warn you it's not safe to take street taxis in Buenos Aires, because of robbery – and it's true, some people have been robbed in taxis. It's all a matter of luck, and usually it's OK to take a taxi off the street (even as a lone woman). In fact, some taxi drivers are better at ripping you off than robbing you. Just make sure the driver uses the meter (and have an idea of where you're going), know your money (fake bills don't have watermarks) and try to pay with low-denomination bills (some drivers deftly replace high bills with low ones). And try to remember that most *taxistas* are honest men making a hard living.

If you want to play it safer, however, call a *remise*. They're considered safer than street taxis, since an established company sends them out. Any business should be able to phone a *remise* for you.

AROUND BUENOS AIRES

TIGRE

North of BA about an hour is this favorite *porteño* weekend destination. You can check out the popular riverfront, take a relaxing boat ride in the Delta del Paraná and shop at **Mercado de Frutos** (a daily crafts market that's best on weekends).

Tigre's **tourist office** (☎ 011-4512-4497; www.tigre.gov.ar; Mitre 305; ☎ 9am-5pm) is next door to McDonald's. Nearby are ticket counters for commuter boats that cruise the waterways; the tourist office is good and can recommend a destination.

The quickest, cheapest way to get to Tigre is by taking the Mitre line from Retiro train station (US35¢, 50 minutes, frequent).

SAN ANTONIO DE ARECO

☎ 02326 / pop 21,300

Dating from the early 18th century, this serene village northwest of Buenos Aires is the symbolic center of Argentina's diminishing *gaucho* culture. It's also host to the country's biggest *gaucho* celebration, **Día de la Tradición**, in November.

The **tourist office** (☎ 453-165; ☎ 8am-8pm) is at the northern end of Arellano.

Narrow tree-lined streets make this low-rise, stoplight-free town pleasant to stroll, so walk a few blocks beyond the old bridge to **Museo Gauchesco Ricardo Güiraldes** (☎ 454-780; admission US75¢; ☎ 11am-5pm Wed-Mon), a ranch sheltering the *gaucho* collection of a famous Argentine author.

Plaza Ruiz de Arellano is beautifully landscaped and sports a parochial church, while local artisans are known for producing mate paraphernalia, *rastras* (silver-studded belts) and *facones* (long-bladed knives).

Buses run from BA's Retiro bus terminal (US\$4, two hours); Chevallier has departures every 1½ hours.

LA PLATA

☎ 0221 / pop 970,000

On Plaza Moreno is La Plata's beautiful neo-Gothic **cathedral**; it took 115 years to finish and was finally completed in 2000. North of town, the extensive 60-hectare **Paseo del Bosque** is home to the ancient but excellent **Museo de La Plata** (☎ 425-7744; admission US\$4; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun). On display are heaps of interesting exhibits such as dried insects, musty mummies and dinosaur skeletons. Nearby is the **Jardín Zoológico** (☎ 427-3925; admission US75¢; ☎ 9am-6pm Tue-Sun).

To get to La Plata, take bus 129 (US\$2, one hour). It departs frequently from the short street Martín Zuviría, across from Retiro train station. La Plata's bus terminal is at Calles 4 and 42, while its train station (corner Av 1 and Calle 44) has half-hourly services to Constitución (US75¢, 1¼ hours).

URUGUAY

Day trips to small, charming, cobbled **Colonia** are popular, and it's also possible to travel to nearby **Montevideo** (Uruguay's capital) for a

couple of days. A good summer destination is the beach resort of **Punta del Este**, only a few hours away from Buenos Aires. For transport links to Uruguay see p69. For more information on these destinations, see the Uruguay chapter, p944.

NORTHEAST ARGENTINA

From the spectacular natural wilderness of Iguazú Falls in the north to the chic sophistication of Rosario in the south, the northeast is one of Argentina's most diverse regions. Wedged between the Paraná and Uruguay Rivers (thus earning it the nickname 'Mesopotamia'), the region relies heavily on those rivers for fun and its livelihood, while next door, the Chaco is sparsely populated, and often called Argentina's 'empty quarter.'

HISTORY

This was Guaraní country first. They were semisedentary agriculturalists, raising sweet potatoes, maize, manioc and beans and eating river fish until the Spanish arrived in 1570, pushing their way south from Paraguay. Santa Fe was founded in 1573, Corrientes a few years later. The Jesuits came soon after, herding the Guaraní into 30 *reducciones* (settlements) in the upper Paraná in the hope of converting them by way of prayer and labor. The *reducciones* were doing a roaring trade in yerba mate (herb mate) production until Carlos III, busy with nation-building back in Spain, decided that the Jesuit's growing power base was too much of a distraction, and booted them all off the Americas in 1767.

Some Guaraní were still out there, though, in the steamy thorn forests of Chaco and Formosa, resisting the newcomers. They lasted until 1850 when the woodcutters from Corrientes came through, looking for the *quebracho* (axe-breaker) tree to satisfy their tannin lust. After the land had been cleared (in more ways than one), the Guaraní who were left were kept busy picking the newly planted cotton and raising cattle.

The War of the Triple Alliance (1865–70) put an end to Brazil and Paraguay's claims on the territory and for a few years Entre Ríos was an independent republic, before joining the Buenos Aires-based Unitarist coalition

under Rosas. Local *caudillo* (chief) Justo José Urquiza brought about Rosas' defeat and the eventual adoption of Argentina's modern constitution.

By the late 19th century, Rosario had become the regional superstar (it even vied for capital status for a while there) as its port did a roaring trade and thousands of rural-dwellers poured in from the countryside in search of a better life.

ROSARIO

☎ 0341 / pop 909,000

So, you dig the vibe of the capital, but the sheer size of it is sending you a little loco in the coco? Rosario may be the place for you.

Located just a few hours north, this is in many ways Argentina's second city. Not in terms of population, but culturally, financially and aesthetically. The city never had much of a backpacker scene, but the huge university and corresponding population of students, artists and musicians means it's all ready to go.

Nighttime the streets come alive and the bars and clubs pack out. In the day, once everybody wakes up, they shuffle down to the river beaches for more music, drinks and a bit of a lie down.

It's not all fun and games, though. Culture vultures won't be disappointed by the wealth of museums and galleries in this historic city, and Che Guevara fans will want to check out his birthplace.

Orientation & Information

The long-distance **bus terminal** (☎ 437-2384; Cafetera 702) is 4km west of center. Many local buses (marked 'Centro' or 'Plaza Sarmiento') go to the center; buy US70¢ magnetic cards at kiosks beforehand. Bus 138 leaves from the train station.

The informative **tourist office** (☎ 480-2230; Av del Huerto) is on the waterfront.

Cambios along San Martín and Córdoba change traveler's checks; there are many banks and ATMs on Santa Fe between Mitre and Entre Ríos.

Sights

Prices, dates and hours change throughout the year. Check with the tourist office to be sure.

The colossal **Monumento Nacional a la Bandera** (Monument to the Flag; ☎ 9am-7pm), located

Out at the airfield, **Paracaidismo Rosario** (☎ 456-6585; www.paracaidismorosario.com.ar in Spanish) offers one-off tandem skydives and longer certification courses.

Back in town, there's a weekend **crafts fair** on Av Belgrano, south of the tourist office.

Festivals & Events

Weekends in January and February, Rosario hosts an excellent open-air **arts and cinema festival** in plazas and parks around the city. Accommodation can get tight during this time. For program details, check with the tourist office or munisur@rosario.gov.ar.

Sleeping

Rosario Inn (☎ 421-0358; Sargento Cabal 54; dm/d US\$5/10) A sweeping marble staircase welcomes you into this classic converted Rosario house. The wooden floorboards, *parrilla* in the patio, spacious kitchen and balconies with river views all make this an excellent, comfortable option.

La Casona de Don Jaime (☎ 527-9964; www.youthhostelrosario.com.ar; Roca 1051; dm US\$6/7 with/without HI card, d US\$13/20 with/without HI card) Rosario's first (and best) hostel is pretty much everything a hostel should be: laid back and run by young travelers. There are comfy sitting areas and a bar attached. There's also a small, clean kitchen, lockers and a variety of activities around town on offer.

Savoy Hotel (☎ 448-0071; San Lorenzo 1022; s/d US\$10/15) The jury's still out on this one: half say it's like a creepy old haunted mansion, others claim it's a grand old place that's fallen on hard times. Regardless, all rooms have high ceilings and ornate fittings and most have balconies.

Hotel Britania (☎ 440-6036; San Martín 364; s/d US\$10/15) The owners are slowly doing this place up, one room at a time, so it's worth asking to see a few. Rooms in the older, front section have way more character.

Hotel Plaza del Sol (☎ 421-9899; www.hotelesplaza.com; San Juan 1055; r US\$40; P, ♻, ♿, ♿) This four-star property offers excellent-value doubles. The breakfast buffet is huge and the swimming pool and sundeck on the 11th floor have great city views.

The most natural campsites are on **Isla Invernada** (per person US\$1) – see opposite – for details on how to get there. On the mainland, **Camping Municipal** (☎ 471-4381; campsites per person US\$1) is 9km north of the city; take bus 35 from the center to Barra 9.

Eating

Rosario is a big city and it doesn't have an obvious center when it comes to restaurants – they're scattered all over the place – but thankfully there's a *confitería* (café/snack bar) on just about every street corner.

La Casa de Nicolas (Mendoza 937; per kilo US\$3) You might get a tan sitting under the strip lighting, and maybe food-by-the-kilo doesn't strike you as the classiest concept, but there's some good vegetarian food on offer at this Asian-themed place, including nori rolls and braised shitake mushrooms.

Roots Café (Roca 1051; mains US\$3-4) 'Ethnic' food is a relatively new concept in Rosario, but Roots takes a pretty good stab at it, with rotating weekly specials from different countries like Peru, China and Mexico.

La Delfina (cnr 3 de Febrero & Mitre; mains US\$4) La Delfina edges away from the pizza, pasta, *parrillada* grind (but not too far) with a good, varied menu and some excellent *picadas* (hors d'oeuvres).

Tyzio (cnr Salta & Paraguay; pizza US\$4-10, mains US\$5) Finally, somebody cottoned onto the fact that pizzas can have more than one ingredient. The folks at Tyzio do it in style, too, with toppings like artichoke hearts, rocket, brie cheese and char-grilled capsicum.

Drinking

For the latest on the nightlife scene, check out the free magazine *Fuera de Hora*, available in tourist offices and hostels around town.

Gothika (Mitre 1539; admission US\$2-4; ☎ 24hr Thu-Sat) Rosario's hottest club (this week, anyway) is set up in a renovated church. Music varies, but concentrates on drum'n'bass and breakbeat. The crowd is young and there doesn't seem to be a dress code (unless it says something about having to wear brown leather slip-ons with shorts).

Peña la Amistad (Maipú 1111; ☎ 10pm-late Fri & Sat) *Peñas* (clubs/bars that host informal folk music gatherings) have been enjoying a resurgence of popularity among young Argentines of late, and if you haven't checked one out, this is one of Rosario's oldest and best respected, and a fine place to start. Things get pretty rowdy later on once the vino starts flowing, with lots of clapping, stomping and singing along.

The biggest buzz in town is about the converted ferry station, the **Estación Fluvial** which has been turned into a complex of upmarket

bars and nightclubs. Among your options are the following:

Louis (admission US\$3-5; ☎ 9pm-late Thu-Sat) Louis is hip and laid-back, a lounge-style club/bar with plenty of different rooms to check out and a DJ spinning cool tunes.

Mel at Rivers (☎ 1pm-late) If you just want to hang out by the water's edge, or have a few drinks before hitting the clubs, this stylish little open-air bar with balconies overlooking the water is the place to be.

Taura (admission US\$3-5; ☎ 9pm-late Thu-Sat) Attracting a slightly older crowd and playing mostly mainstream house and pop remixes, Taura is gorgeously decked out, and you'd better be too, if you want to get in.

Getting There & Away

Aerolíneas Argentinas & Austral (☎ 420-8138; www.aerolineasargentinas.com; Santa Fe 1412) have several daily flights to Buenos Aires (US\$45).

Bus fares from Rosario include Buenos Aires (US\$10, four hours), Córdoba (US\$11, six hours), Santa Fe (US\$5, 2½ hours), Mendoza (US\$18, 12 hours) and Montevideo, Uruguay (US\$38, nine hours).

The **train station** (☎ 430-7272; Av del Valle 2700), 3km northwest of the center of town, has services to Buenos Aires (US\$4, five hours), leaving at 6am Sundays. Due to the poor condition of tracks and carriages and frequent delays, the train isn't such a great option.

SANTA FE

☎ 0342 / pop 369,600

Santa Fe would be a fairly dull town if not for the university population. Thanks to this, there's a healthy bar and club scene, and plenty of fun to be had during the day.

Relocated during the mid-17th century because of hostile indigenous groups, floods and isolation, the city duplicates the original plan of Santa Fe La Vieja (Old Santa Fe), but a 19th-century neo-Parisian building boom and more recent construction have left only isolated colonial buildings, mostly near Plaza 25 de Mayo.

Orientation

Av San Martín, north of the plaza, is the main commercial artery. The airport is 15km south of town. The bus marked 'A (aeropuerto)' goes past San Luis and Hipólito Yrigoyen (US50¢, 45 minutes). From the bus terminal, ask at Tata Rapido or Rio Coronda for their

express airport bus service (US50¢). A taxi should cost about US\$5.

Information

Municipal tourist office (☎ 457-4123; www.santa-fe-turistica.com.ar; Belgrano 2910) In the bus terminal.

Tourfe (Av San Martín 2500) Collects 3% commission on traveler's checks; there are several ATMs along the San Martín *peatonal* (pedestrian mall).

Post office (Av 27 de Febrero 2331).

Sights & Activities

Some colonial buildings are museums, but the churches still serve their ecclesiastical functions, like the mid-17th-century **Templo de Santo Domingo** (cnr 3 de Febrero & 9 de Julio). The exterior simplicity of the 1696 Jesuit **Iglesia de la Compañía** (Plaza 25 de Mayo) masks an ornate interior. The restored, two-story **Casa de los Aldao** (Buenos Aires 2861) dates from the early 18th century.

Built in 1680, the **Convento y Museo de San Francisco** (Amenábar 2257; ☎ 8am-noon & 3:30-7pm Mon-Fri, 3:30-5pm Sat & Sun), south of Plaza 25 de Mayo, is Santa Fe's most important landmark. Its meter-thick walls support a roof of Paraguayan cedar and hardwood beams fitted with wooden spikes rather than nails. The doors are hand-worked originals, while the baroque pulpit is laminated in gold. Its museum covers secular and religious topics from colonial and republican eras.

The **Museo Etnográfico y Colonial Juan de Garay** (25 de Mayo 1470; admission free, donations encouraged; ☎ 8:30am-noon & 4-7pm Mon-Fri, 4:30-7pm Sat & Sun) has a scale model of Santa Fe La Vieja, but the real show-stopper is the *gaucho* 'campchair' – made entirely of cow bones and leather. Gruesome – but comfortable! There are also colonial artifacts, indigenous basketry, Spanish ceramics and a stuffed horse.

Santa Fe has its own **brewery** (☎ 450-2234; www.cervezaschneider.com; Calchines 1401) and brand of beer (called, uh, Santa Fe). Free guided tours of the ultramodern facility are available and culminate in a tasting session, which consists of only one glass per person, regardless of wheedling. Reservations for tours are necessary and you must wear long pants and closed shoes.

The little **skate park** on the shores of Lago de Sur has a half-pipe, ramps and rails. If you've got the moves, you can probably borrow a deck and impress the locals. If not, you can still borrow one and give them something to laugh at. Your call.

SANTA FE

0 700 m
0 0.4 miles

INFORMATION
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Festivals & Events

Santa Fe's **beer festival** (Parque Federal; admission US\$2) takes place on the last weekend in January and first weekend in February. Festivities include plenty of live music and a certain carbonated alcoholic beverage.

Sleeping

The surprisingly seedy area around the bus terminal is the budget hotel zone. It's not dangerous – just the town center for various unsavory transactions.

Hotel Humberto (☎ 455-0409; Crespo 2222; s/d US\$8/12) Rooms in this mom-and-pop-run hotel are clean and reasonable, with some inlaid brick walls giving the place a very Brady Bunch feel. Some cheaper, smaller singles are available.

Hotel Emperatriz (☎ 453-0061; emperatrizhotelsf@hotmail.com; Irigoyen Freyre 2440; s/d US\$9/13;) The best of the budget picks, this place is set in a beautifully remodeled old house. The lobby is a lot more impressive than the rooms, but they're still light and spacious.

Hotel Constituentes (☎ 452-1586; San Luis 2862; s/d US\$10/15) A block from the bus terminal, this hotel has large carpeted rooms with TV. Get one at the back to avoid street noise.

Hostal Santa Fe de la Vera Cruz (☎ 455-1740; hostal_santafe@ciudad.com.ar; Av San Martín 2954; s/d standard US\$25/33;) The standard rooms here are just fine, but for an extra US\$10, you can go for the Superior, which are some of the best rooms in town.

Eating

On Belgrano, across from the bus terminal, several good, inexpensive places serve Argentine staples like empanadas, pizza and *parrillada*. Midnight munchers will be happy to know that the bus terminal sports a 24-hour snack bar, serving huge portions of decent grub.

La Tasca (Av San Martín 2846; breakfast US\$1.50, lunch & dinner US\$3-4) Nothing mind-blowing on the menu here, but it's got a great old-time feel with tiled walls and hardwood furniture. Breakfast and snacks are good and cheap, and there are occasional exhibitions featuring local artists.

Restaurante España (Av San Martín 2644; meals US\$3-5) A huge menu covers the range of seafood, steaks, pasta, chicken and crepes, with a few Spanish dishes thrown in to justify the name. The wine list is a winner, too.

El Quincho de Chiquito (cnr Brown & Obispo Vieytes; all you can eat US\$5-7) Tourists and locals flock to this riverside eatery for outstanding grilled river fish, such as *boga* and *sábalo*, and exceptional hors d'oeuvres, like fish empanadas. Take bus 16 on Gálvez, which parallels Suipacha four blocks to the north.

Círculo Italiano (Hipólito Yrigoyen 2457; mains US\$3-5) A real find. Come for the ritzy atmosphere, the waiters in linen jackets, the complimentary paté, the extensive wine list or the inexpensive set meals. Stay for the classic rock on the sound system.

Drinking

Santa Fe's rock-steady nightlife centers on the intersection of Av San Martín and Santiago del Estero, an area known as La Recoleta. Bars come and go in this area; it's worth going for a wander and seeing where the crowds are. Here are a few to get you started:

El Portrero (25 de Mayo 3455; ☎ 6pm-late Wed-Sat) A supersmooth option to start your night, with big-screen TVs, board games and plenty of polished wood and black steel tubing to set the mood.

El Sheik (25 de Mayo 3452; ☎ 7pm-1am Tue-Sat) Laid-back without being tranquil, this place attracts a young crowd with its cheap drinks and good music.

Lobby Bar (25 de Mayo 3228; ☎ 6pm-late Thu-Sat) The hottest 'predance' in town is this retro-themed bar. The action starts to heat up after 11pm.

Entertainment

La Divina (Costanera Este s/n; ☎ 1pm-late Tue-Sat; admission free-US\$5) This huge tentlike structure is the city's definitive summertime disco. Come and you'll hear everything from *cumbia* (big on horns and percussion, a cousin to salsa, merengue and lambada) and *marcha español* (aggressive drum beats, bleepy noises and chanted lyrics) through to mainstream house and techno.

Getting There & Around

Aerolíneas Argentinas (☎ 452-5959; www.aerolineasargentinas.com; 25 de Mayo 2287) has 45 weekly nonstop flights to Buenos Aires (US\$41).

The **bus information office** (☎ 457-4124) at the bus terminal posts fares for all destinations.

Buses leave hourly for Paraná (US\$1, one hour). Other fares include Rosario (US\$5, two hours), Buenos Aires (US\$15, six hours), Corrientes (US\$20, 10 hours) and Posadas (US\$23, 12 hours). Other destinations include Córdoba and its sierras, Mendoza and Patagonia.

International services go to Porto Alegre (US\$47, 16 hours) and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (US\$100, 36 hours); Asunción, Paraguay (US\$40, 13 hours); and Montevideo, Uruguay (US\$35, 11 hours).

PARANÁ

☎ 0343 / pop 238,000

Although less famous than its sister city across the river, Paraná is in many ways a much more attractive place.

Built on the hilly banks of its namesake river, the historical center is largely intact and the city boasts a couple of majestic plazas. As is the rule in this part of the world, funseekers hit the riverbanks at night to choose from an array of restaurants, clubs and bars.

Orientation

The city's irregular plan has several diagonals, curving boulevards and complex intersections. From Plaza Primero de Mayo, the town center, Calle San Martín is a *peatonal* for six blocks. Bus 1 goes from the bus terminal past the center to the riverside.

Information

There are several ATMs along the San Martín *peatonal*.

Municipal tourist office (☎ 420-1837; Oficina Parque, cnr Bajada San Martín & Laurecena) Paraná's

municipal tourist office has branches at the bus terminal and at the Oficina Parque on the riverfront. The freecall number (☎ 0800-555-9575) is handy if you find yourself in need of on-the-spot, low-cost tourist information.

Post office (cnr 25 de Mayo & Monte Caseros)

Provincial tourist office (☎ 422-3384; Laprida 5)

Sights & Activities

Plaza Primero de Mayo has had an **Iglesia Catedral** since 1730, but the current building dates from 1885. When Paraná was capital of the confederation, the Senate deliberated at the **Colegio del Huerto**, at the corner of 9 de Julio and 25 de Mayo.

A block west, at the corner of Corrientes and Urquiza, are the **Palacio Municipal** (1889) and the **Escuela Normal Paraná**, a school founded by noted educator (later President) DF Sarmiento. Across San Martín is the **Teatro Municipal Tres de Febrero** (25 de Mayo 60), dating from 1908. At the west end of the San Martín *peatonal*, on Plaza Alvear, the **Museo Histórico de Entre Ríos Martín Leguizamón** (🕒 7:30am-12:30pm & 3-7:30pm Tue-Fri, 9am-noon & 4-7pm Sat, 9am-noon Sun) flaunts provincial pride, as knowledgeable guides go to rhetorical extremes extolling the role of local *caudillos* in Argentine history. The adjacent subterranean **Museo de Bellas Artes Pedro E Martínez** (🕒 9am-noon & 4-9pm Mon-Fri, 10:30am-12:30pm & 5:30-8pm Sat, 10:30am-12:30pm Sun) displays works by provincial artists. Both museums welcome the US30¢ voluntary contribution.

The modern **Museo de la Ciudad** (Parque Urquiza; admission free; 🕒 8am-noon Tue-Fri, 4-8pm Tue-Sun, 9am-noon Sat) focuses on Paraná's urban past and surroundings. Winter opening hours are slightly shorter.

From the Puerto Nuevo at the corner of Av Laurencia and Vélez Sársfield, the **Paraná Rowing Club** (☎ 431-6518) conducts hour-long **river excursions** (tickets US\$3; 🕒 Fri-Sun) at 3:30pm and 5pm.

Baqueanos del Rio (☎ 15-543-5337; tours per hr from US\$7) organizes fascinating tours of the river and islands, with special attention paid to wildlife and the traditional lifestyle of the islands' inhabitants. Departs from riverfront tourist office.

Sleeping

Camping Balneario Thompson (☎ 420-1583; campsites per person US\$3) The most convenient campground. Buses 1 and 6 ('Thompson') link it to downtown.

Hotel Bristol (☎ 431-3961; Alsina 221; s/d US\$10/17, with shared bathroom US\$6/10) Spitting distance from the bus terminal (although you might want to go up on the roof to get a clean shot), rooms here are tastefully if sparsely decorated and the beds are superfirm.

Hotel Latino (☎ 431-1036; San Juan 158; s/d US\$10/17) The best of the budget picks in the center, with a maze of small but comfortable rooms, patio areas and a lounge/living area for guest use.

Hotel City (☎ 431-0086; Racedo 231; s/d with TV US\$13/18) Halfway between the bus terminal and the center (and therefore nowhere near the river), the City has a surprising amount of class for the price, with touches like wooden floorboards, original tilework and leafy patio areas.

Hotel Mayorazgo (☎ 423-0333; www.mayorazgohotel.com; Etchevehere, Parque Urquiza; s/d US\$30/50; (P) 🚰 🚰 🚰) Every room in this expansive five-star hotel faces the river; only those on the 1st floor, however, have huge balconies. A casino, pool, travel agency and tanning booths are a few of the amenities available. It's near Blvd Moreno.

Eating & Drinking

A good place to stock up on food is the **Mercado Central** (cnr Pellegrini & Bavio).

Parrilla Brava (Costanera s/n; mains US\$4-6) This is a great place for a sunset beer on the balcony overlooking the river (it's opposite the rowing club). Fish and *parrillada* are on the menu.

Bugatti (☎ 15-504-0770; Portside; mains US\$4-5) No surprises on the menu here – meat, chicken, pasta and fish – but the elegance of the dining room in this renovated post office is worth making the trip for. Even if you're not hungry, the balcony bar is a great place for a few drinks as the sun goes down.

El Viejo Marino II (Av Laurencia 341; mains US\$7) Spend five minutes in this town and people will be telling you that you have to try the fish. Stay another couple of minutes and they'll be telling you to check this place out. They're right, too – the atmosphere is loud and fun, the servings huge, and the specials, like *surubí milanesa* (river fish fried in breadcrumbs, US\$6), keep the locals coming back.

Entertainment

Tequila (Costanera s/n; 🕒 midnight-dawn Thu-Sat) This Tex-Mex-flavored dance club on the river plays the usual mix of mainstream *marcha*, house and salsa.

Getting There & Around

Aerolíneas Argentinas (☎ 423-2425; www.aerolineasargentinas.com; Corrientes 563) has offices in town; flights leave from Santa Fe's airport (see p78).

The **bus terminal** (☎ 422-1282) is on Ramírez between Posadas and Moreno. Buses leave hourly for Santa Fe (US\$1, one hour). Other services and fares closely resemble those to and from Santa Fe.

GALEGUAYCHÚ

☎ 03446 / pop 76,200

Gualeguaychú is a summertime river resort for families. As such, you're likely to see several men who have taken their tops off who really shouldn't have. You have been warned.

It's also a popular gateway for Uruguay and the site for some of the country's most outrageous *Carnaval* celebrations in February, featuring young people who have taken their tops off and should do so more often.

Orientation & Information

Plaza San Martín marks the city center. The **tourist office** (☎ 422-900) is on the Plazoleta de los Artesanos. Several banks have ATMs.

Sights & Activities

The colonial **Casa de Andrade** (cnr Andrade & Borques) once belonged to 19th-century poet, journalist, diplomat and politician Olegario Andrade.

At the former Estación Ferrocarril Urquiza, at the south end of Maipú, the **Museo Ferroviario** has a free open-air exhibit of locomotives, dining cars and a steam engine. Alongside the station, the **Corsódromo** (Blvd Irazusta) is the main site for Gualeguaychú's lively *Carnaval*.

Ahonike Turismo (430-706; 25 de Mayo 581) arranges two-hour city bike tours for US\$5 on weekends.

Felipe Tommasi (425-194) offers two-hour sailboat cruises on the river for US\$8 per person and all inclusive two-day return trips to Fray Bentos (Uruguay) for US\$50 per person.

Sleeping & Eating

Camping Costa Azul (☎ 423-984; campsites per person US\$4) Good facilities overlooking the Río Gualeguaychú, 200m north of Puente Méndez Casariego.

Hotel Tykuá (☎ 422-625; www.tykuahotel.com.ar; Luis N Palma 150; s/d US\$12/23) Bright and modern rooms in this new building surround a very

Zen-like courtyard. Beds are good and firm and all rooms have cable TV.

Hotel Amalfi (☎ 426-818; 25 de Mayo 571; s/d US\$13/20) The best budget deal in town. Rooms have high ceilings, balconies and are extensively carpeted (they even did the bed bases).

Dacal (☎ 427-602; cnr San Lorenzo & Andrade; mains US\$4-5, parrillada for 2 US\$7) One of the better places to eat in town, Ducal looks right across the *costanera* (riverside road) to the river and serves good fish, pasta and meat. This place fills up quickly in summer, so it's worth making a reservation.

Punta Obeliscos (cnr Costanera & Bolívar; mains from US\$4) A great place for fish dishes or a few drinks as the sun goes down. The raised outdoor deck is the place to be on a balmy night.

Getting There & Away

The sparkling **bus terminal** (☎ 440-688; cnr Blvd Jurado & Gral Artigas) is 1km southwest of downtown. Departures include Buenos Aires (US\$8, three hours), Paraná (US\$5, five hours), Corrientes (US\$14, 10 hours) and Fray Bentos, Uruguay (US\$2.50, one hour).

PARQUE NACIONAL EL PALMAR

☎ 03447

The yatay palm (*Syagrus yatay*) covered much of the littoral until 19th-century agriculture, ranching and forestry destroyed palm savannas and inhibited their reproduction. On the west bank of the Río Uruguay, 360km north of Buenos Aires, surviving yatays of 8500-hectare El Palmar have again begun to thrive, under protection from fire and grazing. Reaching 18m in height, they punctuate a soothing subtropical landscape.

To see wildlife, walk along the watercourses or through the palm savannas early in the morning or just before sunset. The most conspicuous bird is the *ñandú* (rhea), but look for parakeets, cormorants, egrets, herons, storks, caracaras, woodpeckers and kingfishers too. The *carpincho* (capybara), a semiaquatic rodent weighing up to 60kg, and the vizcacha are among the most conspicuous mammals.

At night, squeaking vizcachas infest the campground at Arroyo Los Loros and gigantic toads invade the showers and toilets, but both are harmless. The *yarará* is a highly poisonous pit viper. Bites are unusual, but watch your step and wear high boots and long trousers when hiking.

Sights

The park's **Centro de Interpretación** (☎ 493-031), across from the campground, offers evening slide shows and contains a small **reptile house**. At the Arroyo Los Loros campground, rental canoes are available for exploring the placid river. A short hike from the campground, **Arroyo Los Loros** is a good place to observe the **wildlife**.

Five kilometers from the campground, **Arroyo El Palmar** is a pleasant stream with a beautiful **swimming hole**, and a good site for **bird-watching**. Crossing the ruined bridge, you can walk several kilometers along a palm-lined road being reclaimed by savanna grasses.

Sleeping & Eating

Camping Arroyo Los Loros (☎ 493-031; campsites per person US\$2) Good sites, hot showers, a shop and a *confitería*. There's an additional one-off US\$2 charge per tent.

Getting There & Away

Northbound buses from Buenos Aires to Concordia can drop you at the entrance to **Parque Nacional El Palmar** (admission US\$4). No public transport serves the Centro de Interpretación and campground, but hitching is feasible.

PASO DE LOS LIBRES

☎ 03772 / pop 43,800

Aside from getting to Brazil, there is absolutely no reason to be in Paso de los Libres, which lies directly across the Río Uruguay from Uruguaiana. The bus terminal is a half-hour walk from the center through a series of very dodgy neighborhoods – the US60¢ bus fare is a good investment. **Libres Cambio** (Colón 901) will change cash.

Across the dirt lot from the bus terminal, the **Hotel Capri** (☎ 421-260; M Llanes s/n; s/d US\$10/13) is the place to be if you need a lie down and an early breakfast between bus treks.

GETTING TO BRAZIL

The bridge that connects Paso de los Libres with Uruguaiana is about 10 blocks southwest of central Plaza Independencia. Taxis charge about US\$4 to get you to immigration, but cannot cross. The border is open 24 hours. The nearest town covered in the Brazil chapter is Porto Alegre (p324).

A new(ish) hotel, **Hotel Las Vegas** (☎ 423-490; Sarmiento 554; s/d US\$15/25; 🍷) maintains a very '70s motel feel. Still, it's comfortable and reasonably central.

La Giralda (Colón 887; breakfast US\$1, mains US\$3-5) is a popular breakfast spot in a town that will never be known for its culinary achievements. It also serves pizza, *lomitos* (steak sandwiches), pastas, burgers and beer.

From the **bus terminal** (☎ 425-600; cnr San Martín & Santiago del Estero), there are services to Corrientes (US\$8, five hours), Santo Tomé (US\$5, 1½ hours), Paraná (US\$13, 5½ hours) and Santa Fe (US\$13, seven hours).

Expreso Singer and Crucero del Norte buses pass near Paso de los Libres regularly en route between Buenos Aires and Posadas and can drop you at the Esso station on RN 14, 16km from town. A taxi into town will cost around US\$8.

YAPEYÚ

☎ 03772 / pop 2100

Mellow little Yapeyú lies 72km north of Paso de los Libres and has exactly two attractions: the birthplace of national hero General José de San Martín and some remnants from its Jesuit mission past. It once had a population of 8000 Guaraní, who tended up to 80,000 cattle. After the Jesuits' expulsion, the Guaraní dispersed and the mission fell into ruins. Tiny Yapeyú is trying its hardest. What few sights exist are well signposted in Spanish, English, Portuguese and Guaraní.

The **Museo de Cultura Jesuítica**, consisting of several modern kiosks on the foundations of mission buildings, has a sundial, a few other mission relics and interesting photographs.

It's a measure of the esteem that Argentines hold for the Liberator that they have built **Casa de San Martín**, a building to protect the house where he was born, even though it's mostly been eroded to its foundations.

Near the river, **Camping Paraíso** (Maipo s/n; campsites per person US\$3.50) has good hot showers. Insects can be abundant, and low-lying sites can flood in heavy rain. **Hotel San Martín** (☎ 493-120; Sargento Cabral 712; s/d US\$10/13) has cheerful rooms that face an inner courtyard.

Comedor El Paraíso (Gregoria Matorras s/n; mains US\$4-6) serves passable meals and has good river views. It's next to the Casa de San Martín.

Buses stop three times daily at the small **bus terminal** (cnr Av del Libertador & Chacabuco), en route between Paso de los Libres and Posadas.

RESERVA PROVINCIAL ESTEROS DEL IBERA

Esteros del Iberá is a wildlife cornucopia comparable to Brazil's Pantanal do Mato Grosso. Aquatic plants and grasses, including 'floating islands,' dominate this wetlands wilderness covering 13,000 sq km. Trees are relatively few. The most notable wildlife species are reptiles like the caiman and anaconda, mammals like the maned wolf, howler monkey, neotropical otter, capybara, pampas- and swamp-deer and more than 350 bird species.

Bird-watchers and nature nuts from all over the world converge on the village of Colonia Pellegrini, 120km northeast of Mercedes, to take advantage of the ease of access to the park (Colonia Pellegrini lies within the park's boundaries). It's a charming enough place in its own right: dirt roads, no traffic and plenty of trees. There is a **visitor center** across the causeway from Colonia Pellegrini, with information on the reserve. One-hour **launch tours** (US\$8) are outstanding value.

Camping is possible at Colonia Pellegrini and costs about US\$2 per person.

A number of *hospedajes* (family homes) offer rooms with private bathroom for around US\$7 per person, the best of which is probably **Hospedaje los Amigos** (☎ 15-49375), which also has a decent *comedor* (basic cafeteria) out front serving meals for US\$2 to US\$4.

The peaceful, rustic and comfortable **Hosteria Nándé Retá** (☎ 03773-499411; www.nandereta.com; s/d with full board US\$30/42) in Colonia Pellegrini is a good deal for the price. It also arranges transport from Mercedes and offer tours of the wetlands.

Buses run from Corrientes and Paso de los Libres to Mercedes, where Itatí buses to Colonia Pellegrini (US\$5, four hours) leave at 8am and noon, returning to Mercedes at 5am Monday to Friday, and 11am Saturday.

CORRIENTES

☎ 03783 / pop 323,000

Capital of its namesake province, Corrientes is a big, serious city with a couple of decent museums and a reputation for being very budget-unfriendly. Once the sun starts setting, a walk along the riverfront might make you feel a bit happier about being here.

It's one of Argentina's oldest cities and the early-20th-century balconied buildings rising up from the muddy waters of the Río Paraná were the setting for Graham Greene's novel

The Honorary Consul. The once-moribund **Carnaval Correntino** (www.carnavalescorrentinos.com) has experienced a revival and now attracts crowds of up to 80,000.

Perhaps as a reply to nearby Resistencia's claim as the City of Sculpture, Corrientes is setting itself up as the City of Murals, and there are indeed quite a few to be seen as you wander the streets. The tourist offices have maps detailing their locations.

Orientation

Plaza 25 de Mayo is the center of Corrientes' extremely regular grid plan. The commercial center is the Junín *peatonal*, between Salta and Catamarca, but the most attractive areas are Parque Mitre and the shady riverside along Av Costanera General San Martín. Bus No 106 runs between San Lorenzo downtown and the bus terminal.

Information

There are several banks with ATMs around 9 de Julio.

Cambio El Dorado (9 de Julio 1341) changes cash and traveler's checks

Municipal tourist office (☎ 428-845; Plaza JB Cabral) More central than the provincial tourist office, but hopelessly disorganized.

Provincial tourist office (☎ 427200; 25 de Mayo) The best in town.

Post office (cnr San Juan & San Martín)

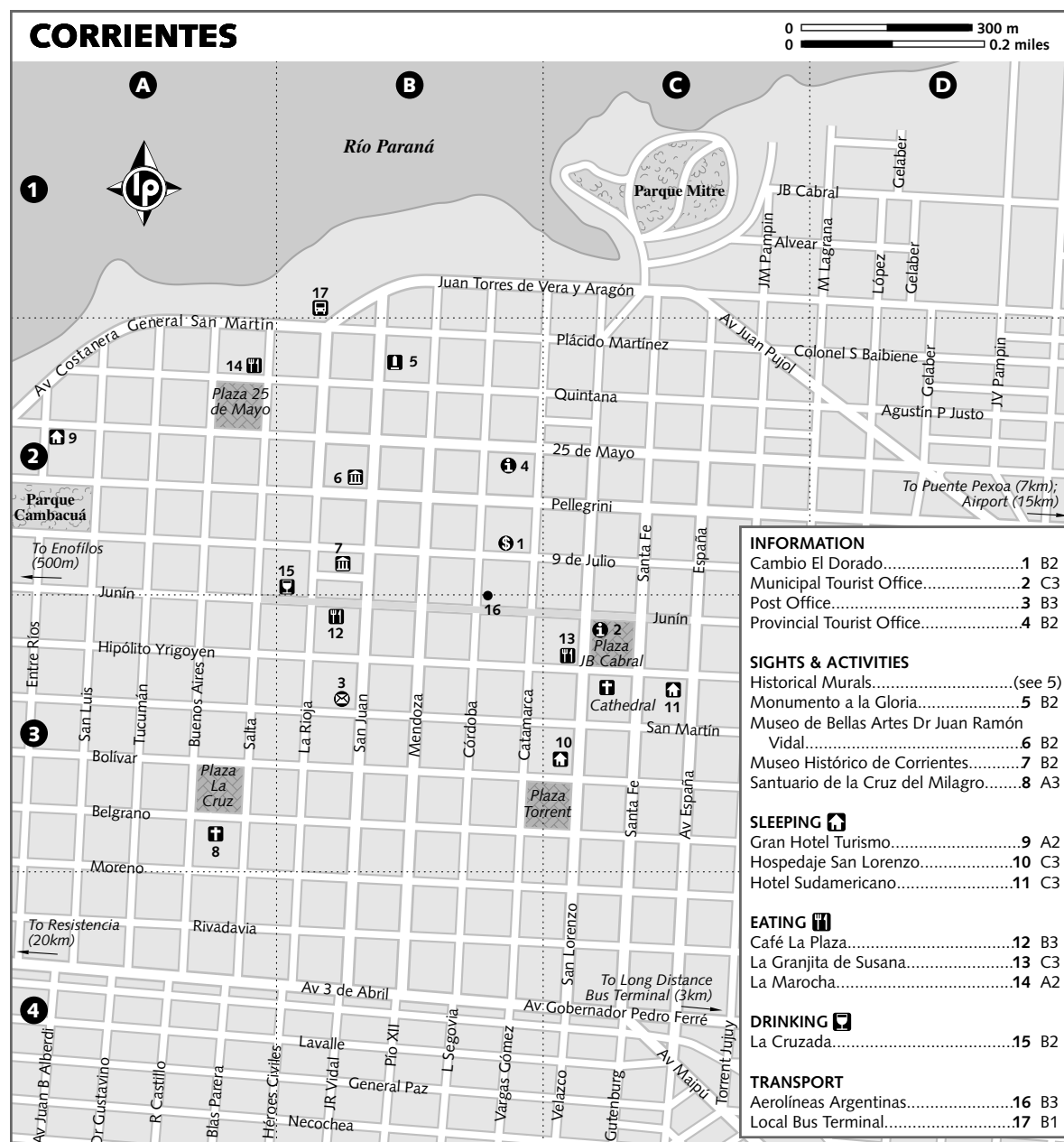
Sights

The east side of San Juan, between Plácido Martínez and Quintana, is a shady, attractive area. The **Monumento a la Gloria** there honors the Italian community; a series of striking **murals** chronicles local history since colonial times.

The **Museo de Bellas Artes Dr Juan Ramón Vidal** (San Juan 634; admission free; ☎ 9am-noon & 6-9pm Tue-Sat) is as interesting for the house it occupies as for the jumble of works found within. It emphasizes sculpture and oil paintings from local artists, as well as hosting the occasional international exhibition.

The **Museo Histórico de Corrientes** (9 de Julio 1044; admission free; ☎ 8am-noon & 4-8pm Mon-Fri) features exhibits of weapons, coins and antique furniture, and displays on religious and civil history.

Visit the **Santuario de la Cruz del Milagro**, on Belgrano between Buenos Aires and Salta. According to local legend, the 16th-century cross here defied indigenous efforts to burn it.



Sleeping

Corrientes bites off the big one in terms of budget accommodation: what there is isn't cheap, and what's relatively cheap isn't very good. In fact, fuck Corrientes – it's not even that interesting *and* they want us to pay top dollar to stay here? If you really want to check out the city, nearby Resistencia (p84) is just down the road and much more wallet-friendly. During Carnival, the tourist office maintains a list of *casas de familia* (accommodations in a family home) ranging from US\$8 to US\$16 per person.

Hospedaje San Lorenzo (☎ 421-740; San Lorenzo 1136; d US\$13) Small, badly ventilated, some say overrun by cockroaches, but still one of the only true budget options in the center.

Hotel Sudamericano (☎ 469-058; Hipólito Yrigoyen 1676; d from US\$13; 🚽) Probably nice once, though it's looking a bit tired these days. About as good as it gets in this price range.

Gran Hotel Turismo (☎ 433-174; Entre Ríos 650; s/d US\$20/27; 📞 🚽 🚿) Built in 1948, this stately old hotel has an attractive restaurant, a large pool, a bar and an excellent riverside location. The rooms are slightly worn, but it's a charming old place, and a lot more atmospheric than other hotels in town.

Eating

La Granjita de Susana (cnr San Lorenzo & Hipólito Yrigoyen; mains US\$2-5) A good budget option, serving empanadas, burgers and steaks at sidewalk tables across from Plaza JB Cabral.

Café La Plaza (Junín 1076; mains US\$4) Nothing exceptional on the menu here, but the locals come and pack out the tables out on the pedestrian walkway, enjoying the evening breezes, good pizzas and cold beer.

Enófilos (Junín 172; mains US\$5-8) This modern yet rustically decorated bar-restaurant overlooking the plaza is a great place to get off the pizza, pasta, *parrillada* treadmill. Wine-appreciation courses are occasionally offered and a small deli sells imported meats and cheeses.

La Marocha (cnr Salta & Quintana; meals US\$4-6) A cute little restaurant-bar with a wider-than-normal selection of salads, meat dishes and some good breakfasts. Also has a good range of wines and cocktails.

Drinking

La Cruzada (Junín 941) This tiny bar has about four times as many tables outside than it does inside, and the atmosphere gets pretty lively as the sun (and the beers) go down.

Entertainment

Puente Pexoa (☎ 451-687; RN 12 at La Rotonda Virgen de Itatí roundabout; 🎵 from 8:30pm, 1st band at 11:30pm Fri & Sat) This relaxed restaurant is a great place to check out *chamamé*, a sort of Guaraní version of polka dancing. Sound deadly? It actually gets very rowdy and is sometimes hilarious. People show up in full *gaucho* regalia, and up to four bands play each night. From downtown, take bus 102 marked '17 de Agosto' 7km out of town to the Virgen de Itatí roundabout. It's just off the roundabout; the driver will point it out. A taxi back costs US\$4 to US\$6.

Getting There & Around

Aerolíneas Argentinas (☎ 423-918; www.aerolineasargentinas.com; Junín 1301) flies daily to Buenos Aires (from US\$80). Local bus 105 (US40¢) goes to the **airport** (☎ 458-358), about 15km east of town on RN 12. A *remise* should cost around US\$4.

Frequent buses to Resistencia (US50¢) leave from the **local bus terminal** (cnr Av Costanera General San Martín & La Rioja). From the **bus terminal** (☎ 458-322; Av Maipú), southeast of town, Ciudad de Posadas goes to Paso de los Libres (US\$8, five hours) via Mercedes for access to Esteros del Iberá. Other destinations include Posadas (US\$11, four hours), Formosa (US\$4, 3½ hours), Puerto Iguazú (US\$15, nine hours), Buenos Aires (US\$25, 11 hours) and Asunción, Paraguay (US\$9, five hours).

RESISTENCIA

☎ 03722 / pop 276,000

Sculpture-lovers wallow around like pigs in mud in Resistencia. A joint project between the local council and various arts organizations has led to the placement of over 300 sculptures in the city streets and parks, free for everyone to see.

Capital of Chaco province and a major crossroads for Paraguay, Santa Fe and trans-Chaco routes to the northwest, Resistencia has excellent transport connections. Delightful Plaza 25 de Mayo, a riot of tall palms and comical *palo borracho* trees, marks the city center.

Orientation

Resistencia's airport is 6km south of town on RN 11; Bus 3 (marked 'aeropuerto/centro') goes to Plaza 25 de Mayo. A taxi will cost around US\$2.

Buses 3 and 10 go from the bus terminal to Plaza 25 de Mayo.

Information

There are ATMs near Plaza 25 de Mayo.

Cambio El Dorado (Jose María Paz 36) Changes traveler's checks at reasonable rates.

Post office (cnr Sarmiento & Hipólito Yrigoyen) Faces the plaza.

Tourist kiosk (☎ 458-289; Plaza 25 de Mayo) About 450m away from the tourist office. Handy.

Tourist office (☎ 423-547; Santa Fe 178) Well stocked.

Sights

There's insufficient space to detail the number of **sculptures** in city parks and on the sidewalks, but the tourist office distributes a map with their locations that makes a good introduction to the city. The best starting point is the open-air **Parque de las Esculturas Aldo y Efraín Boglietti** (cnr Avs Laprida & Sarmiento), a 2500 sq meter area alongside the old French railroad station (1907). The station is now the **Museo de Ciencias Naturales** (admission US\$30¢; 🎵 8:30am-12:30pm Mon-Fri, 5-8:30pm Sat).

El Fogón de los Arrieros (Brown 350; admission US\$1; 🎵 8am-noon, 4-8pm & 9-11pm Mon-Sat) is the driving force behind the city's progressive displays of public art and is famous for its eclectic assemblage of art objects from around the Chaco province, Argentina and the world.

The **Museo del Hombre Chaqueño** (Museum of Chaco Man; Arturo Illía 655; admission US\$30¢; 🎵 9am-noon Mon-Sat) focuses on the colonization of the

Chaco and has exhibits and information on the Guaraní, Mocoví, Komlek and Mataco provincial indigenous cultures.

The **Museo Policial** (Roca 223; admission US\$1; ☎ 8am-noon & 5-9pm Mon-Fri summer, 8am-noon & 4-8pm Mon-Fri winter) is better than one might expect, partially redeeming its trite drug-war rhetoric with absorbing accounts of *cuatrerismo* (cat-tle-rustling, still widespread in the province) and social banditry.

Sleeping

Camping Parque 2 de Febrero (Avalos 1100; campsites US\$3) Has excellent facilities.

El Hotelito (☎ 1564-5008; el_hotelito@yahoo.com.ar; Alberdi 311; s/d with shared bathroom US\$6/9) Airy, whitewashed rooms. The bathrooms are huge and spotless and the owners speak some English.

Residencial Bariloche (☎ 421-412; Obligado 239; s/d US\$10/13) The Bariloche's rooms are an excellent deal: spacious, clean and quiet with cable TV. You can pay an extra US\$3 for air-con or just get blown away by their industrial-sized room fans.

Hotel Colón (☎ 422-861; hotelcolon@gigared.com.ar; Santa María de Oro 143; s/d US\$17/25; P ☎ ☎) An older hotel with some lovely touches, such as dark wood paneling and multiple light wells. Rooms are neat, but unrenovated and showing their age a bit.

Eating & Drinking

Several attractive *confiterías* and ice creameries have rejuvenated the area north and northwest of Plaza 25 de Mayo; you should try, for instance, the bohemian **Café de la Ciudad** (Pellegrini 109; mains US\$4-7), formerly a sleazy bar, for slightly pricey sandwiches, burgers and beer.

Fenix Bar (Don Bosco 133; meals US\$3-5) The wooden floorboards and muted lighting give this little place a great atmosphere. The menu runs the usual gamut of pizza, meats and pastas, but the food is well presented and the wine selection excellent.

La Bianca (Colón 102; mains US\$3-5) The exposed brick walls lined with good art make La Bianca one of the more charming options in town. Pasta and steak feature heavily on the menu, but there are some delicious fish dishes as well.

Charly (Güemes 213; meals around US\$4) You know times are tough when the snobbiest restaurant in town can only bring itself to charge US\$4

for a meal. Carefully prepared meat and fish dishes are the winners here, but there's also a wide range of salads and almost too many wine choices. Budget fiends can eat the same dishes in a more humble environment in the restaurant's *rotisería* around the corner at Brown 71.

Har Bar (cnr Donovan & Perón; ☎ 24hr) Pool is a popular pastime in Resistencia, and many people get together for a few games before going out. The center is dotted with pool halls, all icily air-conditioned and with full bars. The Har Bar is as good a place as any to rack 'em up.

Zingara (Güemes; ☎ 6pm-late Wed-Sat). This hip, minimally decorated bar wouldn't be out of place in fashion capitals like Milan or Paris. Cocktails feature heavily on the drinks menu and light snacks are served.

Getting There & Away

Aerolíneas Argentinas (☎ 445-550; www.aerolineasargentinas.com; JB Justo 184) has daily flights to Buenos Aires (from US\$80).

The **bus terminal** (☎ 461-098; cnr MacLean & Islas Malvinas) has an urban service (marked 'Chaco-Corrientes') between Resistencia and Corrientes for US\$30¢. You can catch it in front of the post office on Plaza 25 de Mayo.

La Estrella goes to Capitán Solari, near Parque Nacional Chaco, four times daily (US\$2, 2½ hours). Godoy goes to Laguna Naick-Neck and Laguna Blanca, near the Parque Nacional Río Pilcomayo (US\$5, 5½ hours).

Other destinations include Buenos Aires (US\$27, 13 hours), Santa Fe (US\$22, 9½ hours), Rosario (US\$24, 9½ hours), Córdoba (US\$22, 12 hours), Salta (US\$25, 14 hours), Posadas (US\$12, five hours), Puerto Iguazú (US\$17, 10½ hours) and Asunción, Paraguay (US\$9, five hours).

PARQUE NACIONAL CHACO

☎ 03725

This little-visited park, 115km northwest of Resistencia, preserves 15,000 hectares of marshes, grasslands, palm savannas, scrub and dense forests in the humid eastern Chaco. Mammals are few, but birds include rheas, jabiru storks, roseate spoonbills, cormorants and caracaras. The most abundant species is the mosquito, so visit in the relatively dry, cool winter (June to August) and bring insect repellent.

Some swampy areas are accessible only on horseback; inquire in Capitán Solari (5km east of park entrance) for horses and guides.

The **Administración** (☎ 496-166; park entrance free) is located at the park entrance. Rangers are extremely hospitable and will accompany visitors if their duties permit.

The shaded **camping area** (free) has clean toilets and showers. There is no food available so bring supplies from Resistencia, although you can buy basics in Capitán Solari.

La Estrella runs four buses daily from Resistencia to Capitán Solari (US\$2, 2½ hours); from there you must walk or catch a lift to the park entrance (5km). You could also try inquiring at **Remis Satur** (☎ 421-004; Alberdi 770) about a share *remise* (US\$3 per person).

FORMOSA

☎ 03717 / pop 198,000

Way out here on the Río Paraguay, this town has a much more Paraguayan feel than others in the region. The riverfront has been tastefully restored and makes for an excellent place to go for a wander once the sun starts going down. In November, the weeklong **Fiesta del Río** features an impressive nocturnal religious procession in which 150 boats from Corrientes sail up the Río Paraguay.

Hotel San Martín (☎ 426-769; 25 de Mayo 380; s/d US\$12/21; 🍴) Good for the price, but otherwise uninteresting, the San Martín is surprisingly quiet for its central location. Some rooms are definitely better than others, so have a look around if you can.

Mercobus (☎ 431-469; Lelong 899) has regular buses to Clorinda, Laguna Naick-Neck and Laguna Blanca (Parque Nacional Río Pilcomayo), departing daily at 6:30am, 9:30am, 12:30pm and 4pm.

PARQUE NACIONAL RÍO PILCOMAYO

West of Clorinda, the wildlife-rich wetlands of 60,000-hectare Parque Nacional Río Pilcomayo hug the Paraguayan border. The outstanding feature is the shimmering **Laguna Blanca** where, at sunset, *yacarés* (alligators) lurk on the surface. Other wildlife, except for birds, is more likely to be heard than seen among the dense aquatic vegetation.

Parque Nacional Río Pilcomayo's free camping facilities are basic. Just outside the park entrance, a small shop sells basic food and cold drinks. There is a bus service from Formosa and Clorinda along RN 86 to Laguna

Naick-Neck and the park entrance at Laguna Blanca ranger station (US\$4, 2½ hours).

POSADAS

☎ 03752 / pop 255,000

If you're heading north, now's about the time that things start to feel very tropical, and the jungle begins to creep into the edges of the picture. Posadas is mainly interesting as an access point, both to Paraguay and the Jesuit mission sites north of here. But it's a cool little city in its own right, with some sweet plazas and a well-developed eating/drinking/partying scene down on the waterfront.

Orientation

Plaza 9 de Julio is the center of Posadas' standard grid. Streets were renumbered several years ago, but local preference for the old system occasionally creates confusion.

Buses 8, 15, 21 and 24 go downtown from the bus terminal.

Information

There are several downtown ATMs.

Cambios Mazza (Bolívar btwn San Lorenzo & Colón) Changes traveler's checks.

Post office (cnr Bolívar & Ayacucho)

Provincial tourist office (☎ 555-0297; turismo@misiones.gov.ar; Colón 1985) Has a wealth of printed material.

Sights & Activities

The natural-history section of the **Museo de Ciencias Naturales e Historia** (San Luis 384; admission free) focuses on fauna and the geology and mineralogy of the province. The museum also has an excellent serpentarium (with demonstrations of venom extraction), an aviary and an aquarium. Its historical section stresses prehistory, the Jesuit missions and modern colonization.

In the cool of the afternoon, the **costanera** (riverside promenade) comes alive. It's a favorite spot for joggers, cyclists, dog walkers, mate sippers, hotdog vendors and young couples staring wistfully at the lights of Paraguay across the water.

Sleeping

Residencial Misiones (☎ 430-133; Av Azara btwn La Rioja & Córdoba; s/d US\$8/12) It's casual, clean and quiet here, and a well-equipped kitchen and clothes-washing facilities are at guests' disposal. Rooms (and beds) vary in quality, so have a look at a few.

Hotel City (☎ 439-401; Colón 7854; r from US\$10; ♿) The drab exterior masks the fact that the City has some of the best budget rooms in town: spacious, with firm beds and good clean bathrooms. Some have air-con and plaza views.

Posadas Hotel (☎ 440-888; www.hotelposadas.com.ar; Bolívar 1949; s/d US\$30/40; ♿) With by far the best-looking interiors of any hotel in town, the Posadas has that somber ambience missing from many modern hotels. Rooms are spacious, comfortable and well decorated.

Eating & Drinking

Ipanema (Av Azara 1629; breakfast US\$1-2, lunch & dinner US\$3-5) Set in an arcade a few steps from the plaza, the Ipanema has good-value breakfasts and plenty of outdoor seating. A full bar and *minutas* (short orders) are also on offer.

De la Costa (Costanera 1536; mains US\$3-5) This is the best of the riverside budget eateries. There aren't any surprises on the menu – pizzas, burgers, steaks – but the drinks are cheap and the views unbeatable.

Café Vitrage (cnr Bolívar & Colón; mains US\$5) With its brass fittings and dark wood features, the

Vitrage oozes style. Mostly a bar/café, it can also whip up a juicy steak any time of the day or night.

La Querencia (Bolívar 322; mains US\$3-7) This is Posadas' spiffiest *parrilla*, on the south side of Plaza 9 de Julio. It has a wide menu, a good wine list and a battery of overhead fans that keep the place from getting stuffy.

Shopping

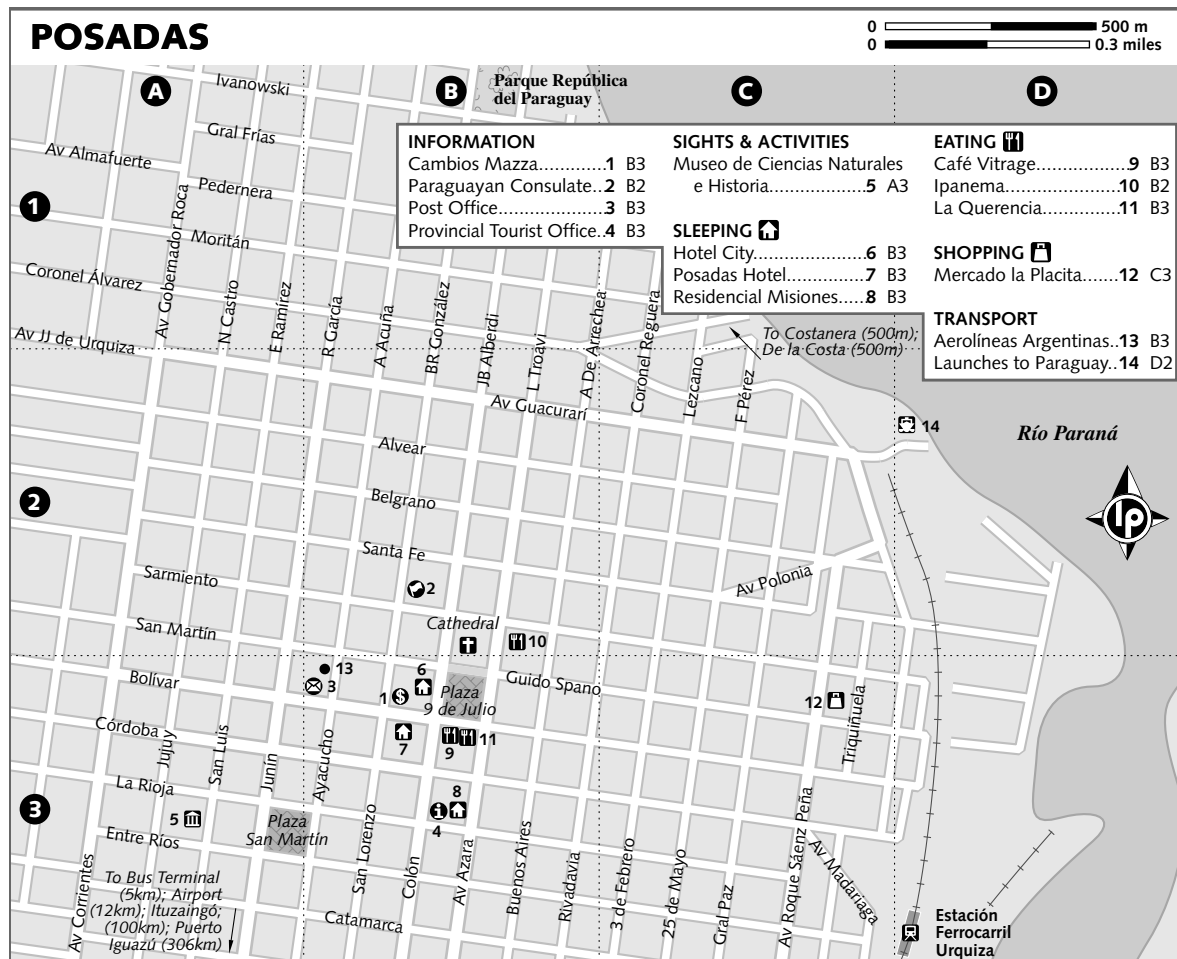
There's something for everyone at the indoor **Mercado La Placita** (cnr Sarmiento & Av Roque Sáenz Peña), from counterfeit sneakers to Paraguayan handicrafts and homemade cigars.

Getting There & Around

Aerolíneas Argentinas (☎ 422-036; www.aerolineasargentinas.com; cnr Ayacucho & San Martín) flies 13 times weekly to Buenos Aires (US\$85).

Bus 8 from San Lorenzo between La Rioja and Entre Ríos goes to the airport, 12km southwest of town and Aerolíneas Argentinas runs its own shuttle service. A *remise* costs about US\$4.

International departures from the **bus terminal** (☎ 4526106; cnr Ruta 12 & Santa Catalina) include



GETTING TO PARAGUAY

Launches across the Paraná to Encarnación (US\$1) continue to operate despite the bridge. They leave from the dock at the east end of Av Guacurará but because there are no immigration procedures on this route, you're best off crossing by the bridge.

Buses to Encarnación (US\$1) leave every 20 minutes from the corner of Mitre and Junín, passing through downtown before crossing the bridge (get off for immigration procedures and hang on to your ticket; you'll be able to catch another bus continuing in the same direction).

Buses also go from Puerto Iguazú to Ciudad del Este (US\$1).

Both borders are open 24 hours. Most non-EU citizens require a visa to enter Paraguay. For info on entering Argentina from Paraguay, see p808.

Asunción, Paraguay (US\$8, six hours) and São Paulo, Brazil (US\$50, 24 hours).

Domestic fares include Corrientes (US\$11, four hours), Resistencia (US\$12, five hours), Puerto Iguazú (US\$12, 5½ hours), Buenos Aires (US\$17, 13 hours; US\$22 in *coche cama*) and Salta (US\$32, 15 hours). Buses to San Ignacio Miní (US\$1.50, one hour) leave frequently.

YACYRETÁ DAM

A vivid lesson in foreign debt, this gigantic hydroelectric project has been plagued by delays, corruption and disgraceful cost overruns since the outset. The dam, which submerges the Paraná over 200km upstream, has already caused the displacement of some 12,000 people and it's estimated that a further 50,000 people, mostly Paraguayans, will be displaced.

At Ituzaingó, 1½ hours from Posadas by bus, the Argentine–Paraguayan Entidad Binacional Yacyretá is still trying to put this boondoggle in the best possible light, the task falling to their public relations office (☎ 03786-420-050), which runs free guided tours (leaving at 10am, 11am, 3pm, 4pm and 5pm).

Camping Mattes (☎ 03786-421-272; 4-6 person cabañas US\$15-20) is 2km south of Ituzaingó. It doesn't offer camping anymore, but the cabañas aren't bad value for groups. **Hotel Géminis** (☎ 03786-420-324; Corrientes 9430; s/d US\$10/20) is the place to stay if you really want to stay in town.

Empresa Ciudad de Posadas and Singer link Ituzaingó with Posadas (US\$4, one hour).

SAN IGNACIO MINÍ

☎ 03752 / pop 10,500

A mellow little town between Posadas and Puerto Iguazú, San Ignacio attracts most visitors for the large, well-preserved ruins of the

Jesuit mission that gives the town its name. If you're staying here and have some time to kill, it's well worth checking out the Casa de Quiroga, too.

Sights

At its peak, in 1733, the **mission of San Ignacio Miní** (admission US\$4; ☎ 7am-7pm) had an indigenous population of nearly 4500. The enormous red-sandstone church, embellished with bas-relief sculptures, was designed in 'Guaraní baroque' style. Adjacent to the tile-roofed church were the cemetery and cloisters; the same complex held classrooms, a kitchen, a prison and workshops. On all sides of the Plaza de Armas were the living quarters. There is a sound and light show at 7pm nightly and a set of fairly bizarre museum exhibits as you enter.

Casa de Quiroga (Quiroga s/n; admission US\$1) is at the southern end of town, offering grand views of the Río Paraná. A small museum contains photos and some of the famous Uruguayan writer's possessions and first editions.

Sleeping & Eating

Hotel San Ignacio (☎ 470-422; cnr Sarmiento & San Martín; s/d US\$10/13, cabañas for 4 people US\$23; 🍷) For a combination hotel/bar/restaurant/internet café/pool hall/teen hangout the San Ignacio's actually a pretty mellow place. Rooms in the main building are spotless and quiet and the funky A-frame bungalows out the back are great value for larger groups.

Residencial Doka (☎ 470-131; residoka@yahoo.com.ar; Alberdi 518; s/d US\$13/17; 🍷 🍷) Just a few steps from the ruins, the Doka has fairly nondescript rooms that sleep up to five people. They're set well back from the road and are therefore quiet. Kitchen facilities are available.

Sleeping

Camping El Pindo (☎ 421-795; per tent US\$3.50 plus per person US\$3.50) At km 3.5 of RN 12 on the edge of town.

Hostel Inn (☎ 421-823; www.hostel-inn.com; RN 12, km 5; dm with/without HI card US\$7/9, d with/without HI card US\$23/40; P ♻️ 📺 📶) Set on three hectares of land, this ex-casino is one of the best hostels in the country. Offering free internet, wi-fi access, a bar, restaurant and a huge pool, it's a great place to stay, relax and meet people. It also offers jungle treks and canoe tours around lesser-known parts of Misiones province.

Hostería San Fernando (☎ 421-2429; cnr Avs Córdoba & Guaraní; s/d US\$18/25) Just across from the bus terminal, the San Fernando is leafy and quiet. The reasonable rooms are smallish, but well ventilated.

Che Roga (☎ 422-931; cnr Bompland & Feliz de Azara; cabins from US\$27; ♻️ 📺) If you're traveling in a group of four or more, the cabins at Che Roga are an excellent deal: spacious and well-appointed with kitchenette.

Hotel Esturión (☎ 420-100; www.hotelesturion.com; Av Tres Fronteras 650; s/d US\$35/40; P ♻️ 📺 📶) If you're planning on splashing out on accommodation while you're in Puerto Iguazú, the Esturión's the place to do it. A Zen-like lobby, beautifully sculptured grounds, tennis courts, restaurant, an excellent pool area and some great views – this place has it all.

Eating & Drinking

El Andariego (P Moreno 229; mains US\$2-4) This no-frills neighborhood *parrilla* has plenty of tables on the street (heck, even the *parrilla* is on the street!) and does good, cheap meat and pasta dishes.

Lautaro (Av Brasil 7; mains US\$3-6) Great pizzas and well-presented meals are on offer at this ultramodern café/restaurant/bar. There's live music some nights, and breezy sidewalk seating for people-watching.

El Charo (Av Córdoba 106; set meals US\$5) A great place to sit and watch the world go by, El Charo has the usual range of *parrillada* offerings, with outdoor seating and some good-value set meals.

Cuba Libre (cnr Av Brasil & Paraguay; 📺 Wed-Sat) Going out in Puerto Iguazú is so much fun that *Brazilians* come here to dance. Imagine that. For now, this place is an atmospheric little pub with a reasonable-sized dance floor, but the owner has big plans and by the time

you come through, it may just be a mega-disco with a capacity for 3000 people.

Getting There & Around

AIR

Aerolíneas Argentinas (☎ 420-168; www.aerolineasargentinas.com; Av Victoria Aguirre 295) flies daily to Buenos Aires (US\$100).

Caracol (☎ 420-064; Av Victoria Aguirre 563) charges US\$2 to the airport and makes hotel pickups; phone for reservations. *Remises* run about US\$9.

BUS

The **bus terminal** (☎ 423-006; cnr Avs Córdoba & Misiones) has departures for Posadas (US\$12, 5½ hours), Buenos Aires (US\$40, 20 hours) and intermediate points. Frequent buses leave for Parque Nacional Iguazú (US\$1, 30 minutes), and there are international buses to Foz do Iguaçu, Brazil (US\$1, 35 minutes) and Ciudad del Este, Paraguay (US\$1, one hour).

TAXI

For groups of three or more hoping to see both sides of the falls as well as Ciudad del Este and the Itaipú hydroelectric project, a shared cab or *remise* can be a good idea; figure about US\$55 for a full day's sightseeing, but make sure you account for the cost of your visa if going to the Brazilian side. Contact the **Asociación de Trabajadores de Taxis** (☎ 420-282), or simply approach a driver.

PARQUE NACIONAL IGUAZÚ

People who doubt the theory that 'negative ions generated by waterfalls make people happier' might have to reconsider after visiting the **Iguazú Falls**. Moods just seem to improve the closer you get, until eventually people degenerate into giggling, shrieking messes. And this is grown men we're talking about.

But getting happy isn't the only reason to come here. The power, size and sheer noise of the falls have to be experienced to be believed. You could try coming early, but you're unlikely ever to have the place to yourself. The **park** (☎ 03757-491-445; admission US\$10; 📺 9am-6pm) quickly fills with Argentines, backpackers, families and tour groups, but who cares? Get up close to the Garganta del Diablo (Devil's Throat) and the whole world seems to drop away.

Guaraní legend says that Iguazú Falls originated when a jealous forest god, enraged by

a warrior escaping downriver by canoe with a young girl, caused the riverbed to collapse in front of the lovers, producing precipitous falls over which the girl fell and, at their base, turned into a rock. The warrior survived as a tree overlooking his fallen lover.

The geological origins of the falls are more prosaic. In southern Brazil, the Río Iguazú passes over a basalt plateau that ends just above its confluence with the Paraná. Before reaching the edge, the river divides into many channels to form several distinctive *cataratas* (cataracts).

The most awesome is the semicircular Garganta del Diablo, a deafening and dampening part of the experience, approached by launch and via a system of *pasarelas* (catwalks). There's no doubt that it's spectacular – there's only one question: where's the bungee jump?

Despite development pressures, the 55,000-hectare park is a natural wonderland of subtropical rainforest, with over 2000 identified plant species, countless insects, 400 bird species and many mammals and reptiles.

If you've got the time (and the money – see p407), it's worth checking out the Brazilian side of the falls, too, for a few different angles, plus the grand overview. For more information, see p326.

Information

Buses from Puerto Iguazú drop passengers at the Centro de Informes, where there's a small natural-history museum. There's also a photo-developing lab, gift shop, bar and many other services, including restaurants and snack bars.

Dangers & Annoyances

The Río Iguazú's currents are strong and swift; more than one tourist has been swept downriver and drowned near Isla San Martín.

The wildlife is potentially dangerous: in 1997, a jaguar killed a park ranger's infant son. Visitors should respect the big cats and, if you should encounter one, do not panic. Speak calmly but loudly, do not run or turn your back, and try to appear bigger than you are by waving your arms or clothing.

Sights

Before seeing Iguazú Falls themselves, grab a map, look around the museum, and (if it has reopened) climb the nearby tower for

GETTING TO BRAZIL

Buses to Foz do Iguazú (US\$1) leave regularly from Puerto Iguazú's bus terminal. The bus will wait as you complete immigration procedures. The border is open 24 hours, but buses only run in daylight hours. For info on entering Argentina from Brazil, see p329.

Frequent buses leave from Puerto Iguazú's bus terminal for Ciudad del Este, Paraguay (US\$1, one hour) and wait at the border as you complete customs formalities.

a good overall view. Plan hikes before the mid-morning tour-bus invasion. Descending from the visitor center, you can cross by free launch to **Isla Grande San Martín**, which offers unique views and a refuge from the masses on the mainland.

Several *pasarelas* give good views of smaller falls, and, in the distance, the **Garganta del Diablo**. A train from the visitor center operates regularly to shuttle visitors from site to site. At the last stop, follow the trail to the lookout perched right on the edge of the mighty falls.

Activities

Best in the early morning, the Sendero Macuco nature trail leads through dense forest, where a steep sidetrack goes to the base of a hidden waterfall. Another trail goes to the *bañado*, a marsh abounding in birdlife. Allow about 2½ hours round trip (6km) for the entire Sendero Macuco trail.

To get elsewhere in the forest, hitch or hire a car to take you out along RN 101 toward the village of Bernardo de Irigoyen. Few visitors explore this part of the park, and it is still nearly pristine forest. **Iguazú Jungle Explorer** (☎ 03757-421-696), at the visitor center, can arrange 4WD excursions on the Yacaratía trail to Puerto Macuco as well as thrilling speedboat trips below the falls (US\$15).

Moonlight walks (☎ 03757-491-469; www.iguazuargentina.com; guided walks with/without dinner US\$27/17) to the falls are offered at 8:30pm and 10:45pm on the five nights around the full moon. Call to reserve a place.

Getting There & Away

For information on getting here by bus, see opposite.

NORTHWEST ARGENTINA

With a very tangible sense of history, the northwest is Argentina's most 'indigenous' region, and the sights and people here show much closer links with the country's Andean neighbors than the European image of its urban centers.

HISTORY

The Central Andean population spread never got much further than what is now northwest Argentina. Before the Spanish arrived, the place was crawling with indigenous tribes: the Lule south and west of modern Salta, the Tonocote of Santiago del Estero, and the Diaguita, doing the roaming nomad thing. Even today, Quechuan communities reach as far south as Santiago del Estero.

Diego de Almagro's expedition came through Jujuy and Salta on the way from Cuzco to Chile in 1535, but it wasn't until 1553 that the first city of the region, Santiago del Estero, was established. Local resistance meant slow going for the conquistadors in these parts, but eventually San Miguel de Tucumán (1565), Córdoba (1573), Salta (1582), La Rioja (1591) and San Salvador de Jujuy (1593) were founded. It took Catamarca another 100 years to find its feet.

As the double horns of disease and exploitation decimated indigenous populations and the *encomiendas* (grant of land and native inhabitants given to settlers) lost their economic value, the region's focus shifted. Tucumán provided mules, cotton and textiles for the mines of Potosí, and Córdoba became a center for education and arts. The opening of the Atlantic to shipping in late colonial times diminished Jujuy's and Salta's importance as trade posts, but Tucumán grew in stature as the local sugar industry boomed.

The region's continued reliance on sugar and tobacco farming meant that it was hard hit during recession times, and even today Jujuy province is one of the poorest in the country. There's an air of optimism, though, as the booming tourist industry brings much-needed income to the area.

CÓRDOBA

☎ 0351 / pop 1,272,000

In 2006 Córdoba was named Cultural Capital of the Americas (hefty title, huh?), which

gives you a fair idea of what to expect here – music, theater, film: whatever you want, you can be pretty sure it's going on somewhere in town. The city also rocks out with seven (count 'em) universities, so the streets, bars and clubs are always hopping and the city has a buzz that some say is unmatched in the whole country.

Orientation

On the south bank of the Río Primero (or Sequoia), 400m above sea level at the foot of the Sierra Chica, the city sprawls north of the river and into the countryside. Its attractive downtown comprises a labyrinth of plazas and colonial architecture.

Plaza San Martín is the nucleus for Córdoba's one million inhabitants, but the commercial center is northwest of the plaza, where the 25 de Mayo and Rivera Indarte pedestrian malls intersect. Local buses don't serve the bus terminal, but it's an easy eight-block walk to the center; just keep moving toward the big steeple. A taxi should cost US\$1.

Information

There are ATMs near Plaza San Martín.

Cambio Barujel (cnr Buenos Aires & 25 de Mayo)

For changing traveler's checks.

Municipal tourist office (☎ 428-5600; www.visitecordobaciudad.com.ar; Rosario de Santa Fe 39)

Municipal tourist office satellite office (☎ 433-1980) At the bus terminal.

Post office (Av Gral Paz 201)

Provincial tourist office (☎ 428-5856) In the historic *cabildo* (colonial town council) on Plaza San Martín.

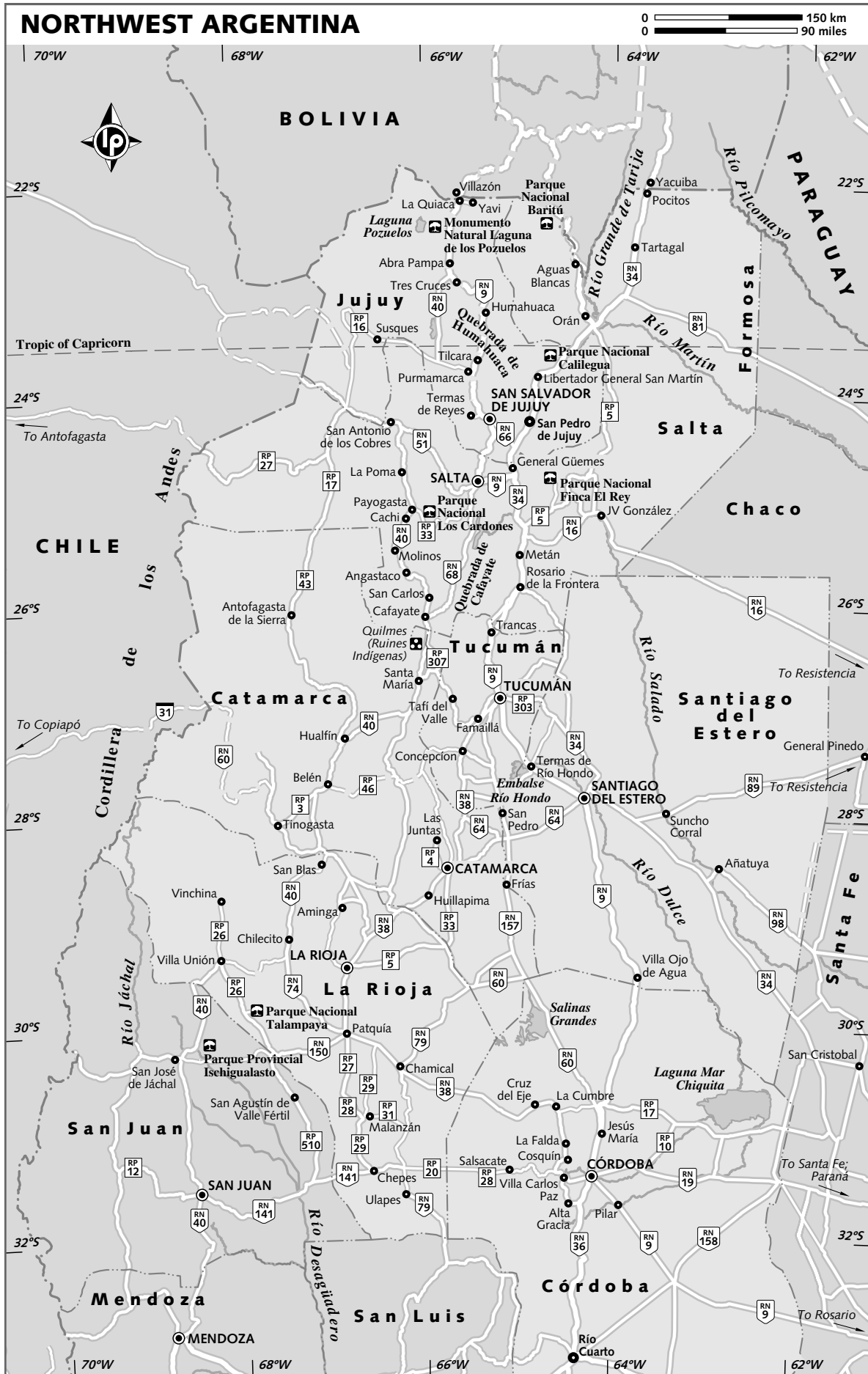
Sights

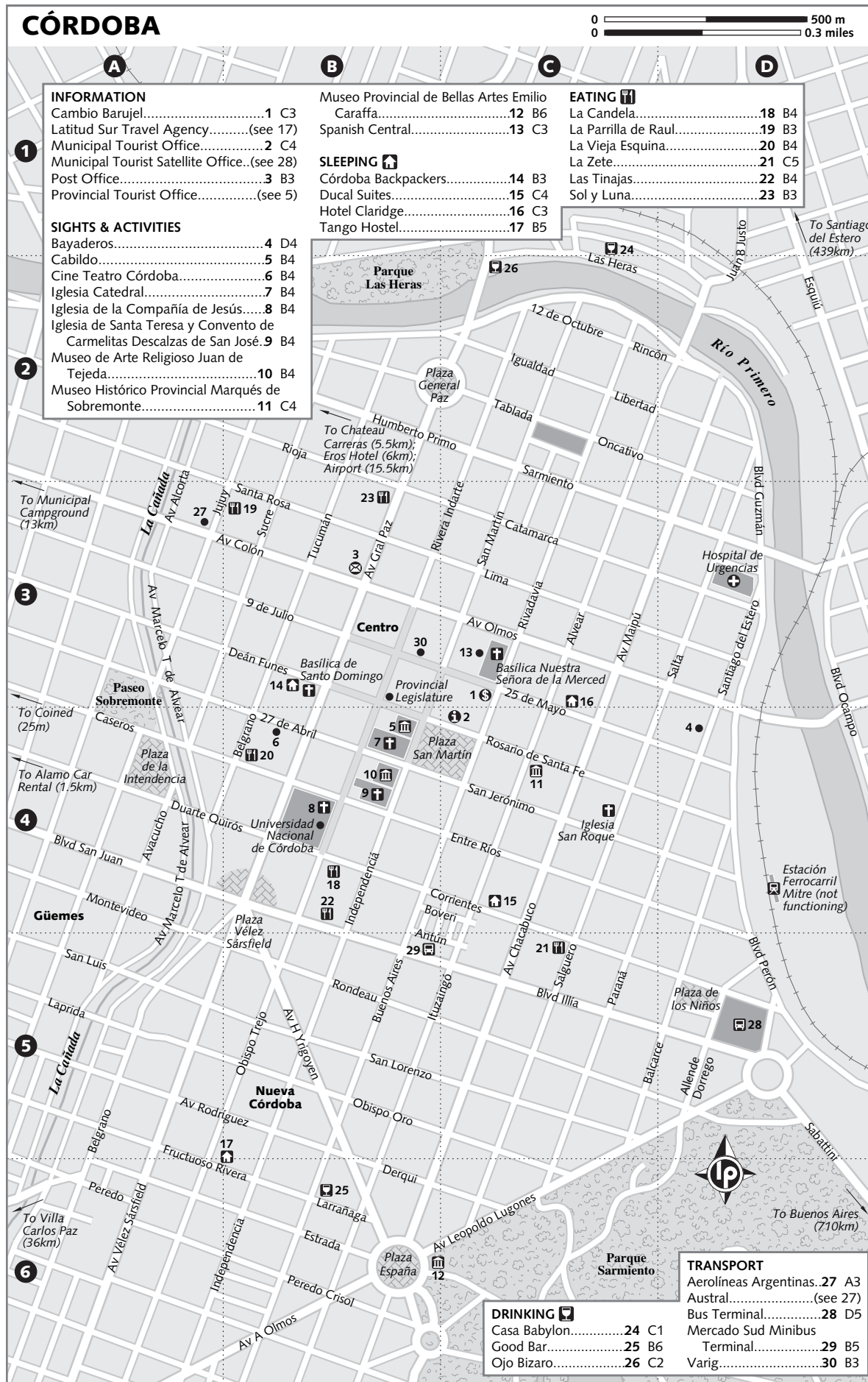
To see Córdoba's colonial buildings and monuments, start at the **cabildo**, on Plaza San Martín. At the plaza's southwest corner, crowned by a Romanesque dome, the **Iglesia Catedral** (begun in 1577) mixes a variety of styles.

The 1645 Jesuit **Iglesia de la Compañía de Jesús** (cnr Obispo Trejo & Caseros) has a modest exterior, but its unique interior is a masterpiece featuring a timber ceiling shaped like an inverted ship's hull.

The **Iglesia de Santa Teresa** and its **convent** have a museum of religious art, the **Museo de Arte Religioso Juan de Tejeda** (Independencia 122; admission US50¢; ☎ 9:30am-12:30pm Wed-Sat).

The huge, stark and modern space of the **Museo Provincial de Bellas Artes Emilio Caraffa** (Av Hipólito Yrigoyen 651; admission free; ☎ 11am-7pm Tue-Sun)





provides contrast to the excellent contemporary art on display. Exhibits are arranged thematically and always have a few wild cards thrown in.

The **Museo Histórico Provincial Marqués de Sobremonte** (Rosario de Santa Fe 218; admission US\$1; ☎ 9am-1pm Tue-Sat) is set in one of Córdoba's oldest surviving houses (1752).

Córdoba has many good cinemas; one of the oldest is the **Cine Teatro Córdoba** (27 de Abril 275), which features art-house films.

Activities

There's plenty of stuff to do in and around Córdoba: paragliding, skydiving, trekking, rafting, rock-climbing, horse-riding and mountain biking to name a few options. Latitud Sur Travel Agency (in Tango Hostel; below) offers all of this and more, and has been recommended for its good service and willingness to give advice on how to do things independently.

Courses

Bayaderos (☎ 422-5572; Santiago del Estero 14) Offers private (US\$7 per hour) and group (US\$3 per hour) dance classes for styles including salsa, tango, contemporary and Arabic.

Spanish Central (☎ 526-1158; www.spanishcordoba.com.ar; Rivadavia 85) Offers individual Spanish classes from US\$8 per hour, with discounts for more hours per week or group classes.

Sleeping

Municipal campground (☎ 433-8012; per person US\$1.50) Spacious but basic, in the Parque General San Martín, 13km west of downtown. Bus 1 from Plaza San Martín goes to the Complejo Ferial, an exhibition and entertainment complex about 1km from the park.

Cordoba Backpackers (☎ 422-0593; www.cordobabackpackers.com.ar; Deán Funes 285; dm/d US\$6/14; 📺) Good sized four- to six-bed dorms, a supercentral location, excellent rooftop area and grassy backyard combine to make this a fine option.

Tango Hostel (☎ 425-6023; www.latitudsurtrek.com.ar; Fructuoso Rivera 70; dm/d US\$6/14) Run by young travelers who know their stuff about the whole of Latin America, the Tango features a welcoming atmosphere and good social spaces. It's a great place for meeting up with people and just generally hanging out. Also here is Latitud Sur Travel Agency.

Hotel Claridge (☎ 421-5741; 25 de Mayo 218; s/d US\$11/14) If the staff on the front desk were a

little more cheerful, this would be a pretty good budget hotel. Pretend you don't speak Spanish, and head upstairs for clean, aging rooms with balconies overlooking the pedestrian street below.

Ducal Suites (☎ 570-8888; www.hotelducal.com.ar; Corrientes 207; s/d US\$40/50; 📺 📺 📺) One of the most comfortable hotels in the center, the rooms here have kitchenettes, spacious bathrooms and (some) excellent views out over the city. In summer months the rooftop pool is a bonus.

Eating

There are many cheap bars and pizzerias in the student haunts around Plaza Vélez Sársfield.

La Candela (Corrientes; mains US\$2-5) A rustic student hangout featuring empanadas and *locro*. It's near Obispo Trejo.

Soly Luna (Av Gral Paz 278; set meals US\$3.50) Don't let the size of this little vegetarian place fool you – the menu selection is wide and changes every day, featuring South American- and Japanese-influenced dishes.

La Vieja Esquina (cnr Belgrano & Caseros; mains US\$2-3) This tiny, atmospheric restaurant features a minimenu of four items (*locro*, *humitas*, empanadas and *tortas*) but all are definitely worth checking out.

La Parrilla de Raul (Jujuy 278; mains US\$2.50-3.50) Founded in 1906, this is the most atmospheric *parrilla* in town. It's small and dimly lit, and the walls are stacked with Argentine wines. *Parrillada* for two costs only US\$3.50 to US\$5.

La Zete (Corrientes 455; mains US\$4-6) The smells that hit you as you walk into this authentic Middle Eastern eatery are guaranteed to get your mouth watering, and the kebabs, empanadas and salads won't disappoint.

Las Tinajas (Blvd San Juan 32; lunch Mon-Fri US\$4, Sat & Sun US\$5, dinner US\$6) The country's largest *tenedor libre* (all-you-can-eat restaurant) is big in every sense, from the selection of Asian food, seafood, salads and pastas to the artificial waterfall and river running through the middle of it.

Drinking

Córdoba's drink of choice is Fernet (a strong, medicinal tasting, herbed liquor from Italy), almost always mixed with Coke. If you don't mind a rough morning, start in on the Fernet con Coke. There are basically two areas to go out in Córdoba: Nuevo Córdoba, where all

the bright young things go to be fashionable, and the area to the north of town known as Abasto, where things are kept much more real. Most venues charge US\$3 admission, which entitles you to a free drink.

Ojo Bizaro (Igualdad 176; ☎ 11pm-late Wed-Sat) One of Córdoba's truly bohemian hangouts, the Ojo is split into various rooms with plenty of low-slung vinyl sofas, eclectic decorations and two DJs, one out front spinning pop, the other in the back doing electronica.

Casa Babylon (Las Heras 48) Córdoba's definitive ska and reggae club is small, but about 90% dance floor, so you should find the skanking relatively easy. Things get irie around 1am and stay that way 'til sunup.

Good Bar (cnr Buenos Aires & Larrañaga) You'll recognize it by the surfboard stuck on the front of the building and the crowd inside warming up after midnight.

Entertainment

On Friday nights, the city hosts the Patio del Tango (admission US\$1, with dance lessons US\$2) on the outdoor Patio Mayor of the historic *cabildo* (weather permitting), kicking off with two-hour tango lessons.

Getting There & Around

AIR

Aerolíneas Argentinas & Austral (☎ 482-1025; www.aerolineasargentinas.com; Av Colón 520) fly regularly to Buenos Aires (from US\$50).

Varig (☎ 425-6262; 9 de Julio 40, 7th fl) flies to Porto Alegre, Florianópolis and São Paulo, Brazil, but all flights go via Buenos Aires, so you're better off going there first and getting a cheaper flight.

Internet-based **Gol** (www.voegol.com.br) flies to Brazil, Paraguay and Buenos Aires. Check their website for specials.

The **airport** (☎ 465-0392) is about 15km north of town. Bus A5 (marked 'Aeropuerto') leaves from Plaza San Martín. Buy a US30¢ *cospel* (token) from a kiosk before traveling. Taxis to the airport cost about US\$4.

BUS

Córdoba's **bus terminal** (☎ 433-1988; Blvd Perón 380) has departures for Tucumán (US\$12, eight hours), Buenos Aires (US\$24, 10 hours), Mendoza (US\$16, 10 hours), Posadas (US\$25, 18 hours) and Salta (US\$24, 13 hours). There are also international services to Florianópolis, Brazil (US\$66, 32 hours); Montevideo, Uru-

guay (US\$43, 15 hours) and Santiago, Chile (US\$32, 16 hours).

AROUND CÓRDOBA

Frequent minibuses leave from the **Mercado Sud Minibus Terminal** (Blvd Illia), near Buenos Aires, for all of the following destinations.

Cosquín

☎ 03541 / pop 19,000

Cosquín will always be famous for its nine-day **Festival Nacional del Folklore** (held every January for more than 30 years), the best place to spot hot new Argentine talent. It *used* to be famous for the totally balls-out Cosquín Rock Festival, but then the suits got involved, 'administrative problems' arose and the festival moved elsewhere. Typical. If you want to stay here for the folk festival, book months in advance. Otherwise it's an easy day trip from Córdoba.

Cerro Pan de Azúcar, east of town, offers good views of the sierras and the city of Córdoba. Hitch or walk (buses are few, but a taxi costs US\$6 return) 7km to a saddle, where an *aerossilla* (chairlift; US\$3) climbs to the top, or take a steep 25-minute walk to the 1260m summit. Also at the saddle is a *confitería*, the owner of which, a devotee of Carlos Gardel, has decorated the grounds with Gardel memorabilia.

There's nothing special going on at **Hospedaje Remanso** (☎ 452-681; Gral Paz 38; s/d US\$9/13), but the rooms are quiet and the place is clean and well run.

Warning: the woman who runs **Hospedaje Siempreverde** (☎ 450-093; Santa Fe 525; d US\$18) is so charming you'll probably end up feeling guilty if you don't stay here. The hotel's a charmer, too: lovingly decorated spacious rooms around a shady garden area.

The tiny **Mi Rancho** (San Martín 478; mains US\$3-4) expands somewhat with sidewalk seating, and does excellent empanadas, *locro* and pizza.

There's nothing small or intimate about **Parrilla Posta Maiten** (Perón 587; mains US\$4-6), but it gets warm recommendations from all over town.

Frequent buses run to Córdoba (US\$2, 1½ hours) and La Falda (US\$1, 45 minutes).

La Falda

☎ 03548 / pop 15,000

Obviously a resort town (and if anybody knows why, feel free to write in), La Falda's hotels outnumber all other businesses combined.

There's hiking in them there hills; trails leave from the miniature train museum (see following) where there are also swimming pools and lookouts over town. More swimming can be had at **7 Cascadas** (entry with transport from tourist office US\$1), which counts on three pools and a variety of swimming holes under waterfalls that were created when the local dam was built. The **tourist office** (☎ 423-007; España 50) opens erratically, but it's very helpful.

The **Museo de Trens en Miniatura** (Miniature Train Museum; admission US\$3; ☎ 9am-8pm) warrants a quick visit.

Hostería Marina (☎ 422-640; Güemes 134; r per person incl breakfast US\$4) is La Falda's best value lodging. **Hospedaje San Remo** (☎ 424-875; Argentina 108; r per person incl breakfast US\$5) is another good bet.

There are many *parrillas* and pizzerias along Av Edén.

Real budget-watchers should check out **Tentaciones** (Diagonal San Martín 74; mains US\$1-5). Mostly takeout, but with a few tables, the offerings here are basic but filling burgers, sandwiches and pizza.

Way up the hill, past 15 very tempting options, **La Parrilla de Raúl** (Edén 1000; all you can eat US\$5.50) is worth the wait: a huge selection of meats and salads and live music on weekends.

Buses run to and from Córdoba (US\$2, two hours).

Jesús María

☎ 03525 / pop 27,000

After losing their operating funds to pirates off the coast of Brazil, the Jesuits produced and sold wine from Jesús María to support their university in colonial Córdoba. These days the town, 51km north of Córdoba via RN 9, hosts the annual **Fiesta Nacional de Doma y Folklore** (www.festivaljesusmaria.com), a celebration of *gaucho* horsemanship and customs, during early January.

If you're only planning on seeing one Jesuit Mission, **Museo Jesuítico Nacional de Jesús María** (admission US\$1) should probably be it. Easily accessed, but in a peaceful rural setting, it's been wonderfully preserved and restored and is crammed full of artifacts. For some reason there's a contemporary art exhibition on the top floor. Go around the back to check out the antique wine-making gear.

Buses run between Córdoba and Jesús María (US\$1.50, one hour).

Alta Gracia

☎ 03547 / pop 43,000

Only 35km southwest of Córdoba, the colonial mountain town of Alta Gracia is steeped in history. Its illustrious residents have ranged from Jesuit pioneers to Viceroy Santiago Liniers, Spanish composer Manuel de Falla and revolutionary Ernesto 'Che' Guevara. The tourist office is located in the clocktower opposite the museum Virrey Liniers and has a good town map.

From 1643 to 1762, Jesuit fathers built the **Iglesia Parroquial Nuestra Señora de la Merced**, on the west side of the central Plaza Manuel Solares; the nearby Jesuit workshops of **El Obraje** (1643) are now a public school. Liniers, one of the last officials to occupy the post of Viceroy of the Río de la Plata, resided in what is now the **Museo Histórico Nacional del Virrey Liniers** (admission US\$1; 9am-8pm Tue-Fri, 9:30am-12:30pm & 5-8pm Sat, Sun & holidays), alongside the church.

Though the Guevaras lived in several houses in the 1930s, their primary residence was **Villa Beatriz**, which has now been converted into the **Museo Casa Ernest 'Che' Guevara** (Avellaneda 501). The museum focuses heavily on the legend's early life, and, judging by the photographs, Che was a pretty intense guy by the time he was 16, and definitely had his cool look down by his early 20s.

The charming, simple rooms at **Hostería Asturias** (☎ 423-668; Vélez Sársfield 127; s/d US\$8/15) are often booked out.

The long, narrow rooms at **Hostal Hispania** (☎ 426-555; Vélez Sársfield 57; s/d US\$15/25; 🚽) are supermodern and set around a lovely garden area featuring a beautifully tiled swimming pool. Many of the rooms have balconies.

Edgards (Vierra 225; mains US\$2-3) has excellent Middle Eastern food, including doner kebabs (US\$2), plus a range of *lomitos*, empanadas and pizzas.

Hispania (Urquiza 90; mains US\$3-5) is another good choice, specializing in large portions.

From the **bus terminal** (cnr Perón & Butori), buses run every 15 minutes to and from Córdoba (US\$1, one hour).

Villa Carlos Paz

☎ 03541 / pop 56,000

Let's be honest. You're either going to love it here or hate it. A little slice of Vegas in the Sierras, Carlos Paz has everything you could hope for, and many things you probably didn't realize you were hoping for: hotels done

out like Egyptian pyramids and the Kremlin, miniature trains zipping around doing day tours, fun parks galore and – the city's pride and joy – a two-story cuckoo clock (*reloj cu-cu* for the Spanish speakers among us). The **tourist office** (☎ 436-430; San Martín-Hipólito Yrigoyen intersection) is behind the bus terminal.

The excellent **Carlos Paz Backpackers** (☎ 433-0593; cnr Sarmiento & Edison; s/d US\$5/8), a 10-minute walk from 'the clock', has spacious four- to six-bed dorms and a sitting area with great views. It organizes canoeing, canopy, rafting, trekking and rappelling trips in the nearby mountains from US\$15 per day.

Smack in the center (some rooms even have views of the *cu-cu!*), the big pink **Terrazas del Redantor** (☎ 434-430; www.acarlospaz.com/terrazasdelredantor.html; Ameghino 48; s/d US\$13/26; 🍷) has modern, spacious rooms and a comfortable, if somewhat stark, garden area.

Locals insist **Parrilla Saint Jean** (San Martín 200; mains US\$2.50-7) is the best *parrilla* in town.

There are frequent buses from here to Córdoba (US\$1.50, one hour) and Cosquín (US\$1, 45 minutes).

LA RIOJA

☎ 03822 / pop 146,000

This is siesta country, folks. Between noon and 5pm *everything* shuts down (except, for some reason, bookstores). Once the sun starts dipping behind the surrounding mountains, people emerge from their houses, and the city and its three gorgeous central plazas take on a lively, refreshed feel.

In 1591 Juan Ramírez de Velasco founded Todos los Santos de la Nueva Rioja, at the base of the Sierra del Velasco, 154km south of Catamarca. The 1894 earthquake destroyed many buildings, but the restored commercial center, near Plaza 25 de Mayo, replicates colonial style.

Information

La Rioja's **tourist office** (☎ 426-345; Pelagio Luna 345) has a decent city map and many kilos worth of brochures covering other provincial destinations.

La Rioja has no *cambios*, but several banks have ATMs. The **post office** is at Perón 764.

Sights

The following two museums were closed 'for renovations' at the time of research, and have been for some time. If they ever open, no

doubt they'll welcome the US\$1 voluntary contribution.

The **Museo Folklórico** (Pelagio Luna 811) is set in a wonderful 19th-century house, displaying ceramic reproductions of mythological figures from local folklore as well as *gaucho* paraphernalia and colorful weavings.

The **Museo Inca Huasi** (Alberdi 650) exhibits over 12,000 pieces, from tools and artifacts to Diaguita ceramics and weavings.

The **Convento de San Francisco** (cnr 25 de Mayo & Bazán y Bustos) houses the Niño Alcalde, a Christ-child icon symbolically recognized as the city's mayor. The **Iglesia Catedral** (cnr San Nicolás & 25 de Mayo) contains the image of patron saint Nicolás de Bari, another devotional object.

Festivals & Events

The December 31 ceremony **El Tinkunako** re-enacts San Francisco Solano's mediation between the Diaguitas and the Spaniards in 1593. When accepting peace, the Diaguitas imposed two conditions: resignation of the Spanish mayor and his replacement by the Niño Alcalde.

Sleeping

Country Las Vegas (campsites per person US\$2) The campground is at km 8 on RN 75 west of town; to get there, catch city bus 1 southbound on Perón.

Pensión 9 de Julio (☎ 426-955; cnr Copiapó & Vélez Sársfield; s/d incl breakfast US\$7/10) Large rooms with private bath and a lovely shaded courtyard overlooking Plaza 9 de Julio.

Hotel Imperial (☎ 422-478; Mariano Moreno 345; s/d US\$13/20; 🍷 🍷) If you're at all tile-ophobic, you'll want to give this one a miss – they're everywhere. Otherwise, it's an excellent deal: big, airy rooms with cable TV and modern bathrooms a 10-minute walk from the center.

Hotel Plaza (☎ 425-215; www.plazahotel-larioja.com.ar; cnr 9 de Julio & San Nicolás de Bari; s/d US\$30/35; 🍷 🍷 🍷) Some rooms here overlook the plaza, making them a good deal. Others open onto internal lightwells (not so attractive, but still good for ventilation). The place has a pleasant old-time feel in the lobby and restaurant that vaguely follows through to the rooms.

Eating

Hollywood (cnr Rivadavia & San Martín; meals US\$3-4) This could well be the perfect restaurant. Outdoor

or air-con seating, tasty Middle Eastern–styled tapas, a wide range of Argentine standards on the menu, and it's open 'til the wee, wee hours for postmidnight munching.

Café del Paseo (Pelagio Luna & 25 de Mayo; mains US\$3-5) An appealing *confitería*, with tables around a shaded courtyard.

La Aldea de la Virgen de Lujan (Rivadavia 756; mains US\$3-5) This place serves excellent homemade pasta and, very occasionally, regional specialties. Either way, the servings are big and the food is wholesome.

Stanza (Dorrego 160; mains US\$4-6) One of the best places to eat in town, this friendly neighborhood restaurant serves up imaginative seafood and Italian dishes in an intimate environment.

Entertainment

New Milenium (San Martín 150; ☎ Wed-Sat) If you're in the mood for a mega-disco (and aren't we all, always?) this is a central option for shaking that thing.

Getting There & Away

Aerolíneas Argentinas (☎ 426-307; www.aerolineasargentinas.com; Belgrano 63) flies Monday to Saturday to Buenos Aires (US\$90).

La Rioja's **bus terminal** (☎ 425-453; cnr Artigas & España) has departures to Chilecito (US\$3, three hours), Catamarca (US\$7, two hours), Tucumán (US\$12, five hours), Córdoba (US\$12, 5½ hours), San Luis (US\$11, eight hours), San Juan (US\$8, six hours), Mendoza (US\$17, eight hours), Salta (US\$17, 10 hours) and Buenos Aires (US\$33, 16 hours).

CATAMARCA

☎ 03833 / pop 141,000

Surrounded by mountains and centered around shady Plaza 25 de Mayo, Catamarca is an attractive place. The only problem is that it lacks anything of any real substance to do. Once a year, the town gets mobbed by hard-core religious types, groupies of the Virgen del Valle. After that things quieten down pretty quickly.

Orientation

The bus terminal is five blocks south of the center: as you walk out of the terminal turn right, walk along Güemes until you get to Plaza 25 de Agosto, then hang a right up Hipólito Yrigoyen until you bump into Plaza 25 de Mayo.

Information

Several downtown banks have ATMs.

Banco Catamarca (Plaza 25 de Mayo) Can change traveler's checks in 24 hours.

Municipal tourist office (☎ 437-743; turismocatamarca@cedeconet.com.ar; República 446) Has a wealth of material on the town and surrounds. Staff are usually very helpful.

Post office (San Martín 753)

Sights

The neocolonial **Iglesia y Convento de San Francisco** (cnr Esquiú & Rivadavia) contains the cell of Fray Mamerto Esquiú, famous for his vocal defense of the 1853 constitution. After being stolen and left on the roof years ago, a crystal box containing his heart (perched on a velvet cushion) is on display in the church.

Enough with these thematically organized, artistically lit 'cultural installations' curated by spiky haired, facially pierced Curatorial Engineers. **Museo Arqueológico Adán Quiroga** (Sarmiento btwn Esquiú & Prado; admission US\$1; ☎ 7am-1pm & 2:30-8:30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-7pm Sat & Sun) is how a museum should be – crammed so full of precolonial pottery, mummies, skulls, metalwork, and colonial and religious artifacts that you practically have to get down on your hands and knees to rummage through it all, and curated by an old guy in a grey dustcoat with ear hair who doesn't want to know about you, but once he warms up, he rambles on for hours.

Festivals & Events

Fiesta de Nuestra Señora del Valle On the Sunday after Easter thousands of pilgrims from across Argentina honor the Virgen del Valle. On December 8, a colorful procession carries the Virgin through the town.

Fiesta del Poncho A more provincial event, held during two weeks in July.

Sleeping

Autocamping Municipal (campsites per tent/person US\$2/1) This place gets heavy use on weekends and holidays, and has some ferocious mosquitoes. It's about 4km from downtown. To get there take bus 10 (marked 'camping') from Convento de San Francisco, on Esquiú.

Residencial Avenida (☎ 422-139; Güemes 754; s/d US\$5/9) The Avenida offers good-value (for the price) rooms *really* close to the bus terminal. Singles have shared bathrooms, doubles huge private ones. The central courtyard is a good place to soak up the sun.

Sol Hotel (☎ 430-803; solhotel@hotmail.com; Salta 1142; s/d US\$13/18) The Sol's bright, cheery rooms are the best value out of the cheapies near the terminal. Some are much better than others; ask to see a few.

Hotel Casino Catamarca (☎ 432928; César Carman s/n; s/d US\$15/23; 🚗 🚗) With the most character of all of Catamarca's hotels, this one is a real bargain. Rooms are spacious, with terracotta tilework and brass fittings. Rear rooms overlook a well-kept garden area with a huge pool. The place can get noisy on weekends when it hosts parties.

Eating & Drinking

Richmond Bar (República 540; mains US\$2-7) Right on the plaza, this classy restaurant/bar is a great place to stop in for a coffee or snack any time of day or night.

Sociedad Española (Virgen del Valle 725; mains US\$3-7) The Spanish Society is always worth hunting down for traditional Spanish dishes, including seafood. It's a grand old place, and well worth the trek for some fine dining.

Los Troncos (M Botello 25; mains US\$3-7) Judging by what pretty much every taxi driver says (and these guys know their stuff), this is the best *parrilla* in town. It also does good fish and pasta dishes.

Bars and discos can be found on Av Galindez (the western extension of Prado), reasonably close to the center; a taxi out here should cost about US\$1.

Getting There & Away

Aerolíneas Argentinas (☎ 424-460; www.aerolineasargentinas.com; Sarmiento 589, 8th fl) flies to Buenos Aires (US\$100) from Monday to Saturday.

Catamarca's **bus terminal** (☎ 423-415; Güemes 850) has departures to La Rioja (US\$7, two hours), Tucumán (US\$6, three hours), Santiago del Estero (US\$6, five hours), Córdoba (US\$9, 5½ hours), Salta (US\$10, eight hours), San Juan (US\$16, seven hours), Mendoza (US\$17, 10 hours) and Buenos Aires (US\$43, 16 hours).

SANTIAGO DEL ESTERO

☎ 0385 / pop 231,000

Due to its central location, Santiago is a major transport hub: you can catch a bus from here to just about anywhere in the country. Unfortunately for 'modern' Argentina's oldest city, its list of charms pretty much ends there. The Museo Wagner is worth a look in if you've got a couple of hours to kill between buses,

but after that even the tourist office is kinda stumped about why you would be here.

The provincial **tourist office** (☎ 421-3253; Libertad 417) sometimes shows work by provincial artists. Several banks in the downtown area have ATMs but it is difficult to change traveler's checks. The post office is at the corner of Buenos Aires and Urquiza.

The **Museo Wagner de Ciencias Antropológicas y Naturales** (Avellaneda 355; 🕒 7:30am-1:30pm & 2-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-noon Sat & Sun) offers free guided tours of its well-presented collection of fossils, funerary urns, Chaco ethnography and dinosaur findings.

Sleeping & Eating

Campamento Las Casuarinas (Parque Aguirre; campsites per person US\$1.50) Offers shady campsites less than a kilometer from Plaza Libertad.

Residencial Emaus (☎ 421-5893; Moreno Sur 673; s/d US\$10/13) Somebody's been doing weird stuff to the walls in the rooms here, but apart from that they're all spotless.

Hotel Savoy (☎ 421-1234; www.savoyssantiago.com.ar; Tucumán 39; s/d US\$15/25; 🚗 🚗) The eye-popping grandeur of the facade and lobby here make up for the fairly ordinary rooms. Excellent value, smack in the middle of town.

Mercado Armonía (Tucumán btwn Pellegrini & Salta) Cheap, but less appealing than some Argentine markets.

Jockey Club (Independencia 68; mains US\$3-5) For fine dining right on the square, check this place out. You don't even have to be short or talk funny to eat here. There's a fairly standard range of dishes, but the set meals (US\$4) are a bargain.

Getting There & Around

Aerolíneas Argentinas (☎ 422-4335; www.aerolineasargentinas.com; 24 de Septiembre 547) flies daily to Buenos Aires (US\$100).

The **bus terminal** (☎ 421-3746; cnr Pedro León Gallo & Saavedra) is eight blocks south of Plaza Libertad. A *remise* from the airport costs around US\$2.

There are frequent departures to Tucumán (US\$3, two hours), Catamarca (US\$5, five hours) and Buenos Aires (US\$16, 13 hours).

TUCUMÁN

☎ 0381 / pop 528,000

A big city with a small-town feel, Tucumán is definitely improving in terms of the back-packing scene. There are some good hostels, a pumping nightlife and some excellent



adventures to be had in the surrounding hills. Independence Day (July 9) celebrations are especially vigorous in Tucumán, which hosted the congress that declared Argentine independence in 1816.

Orientation

The bus terminal is a few blocks from the center, an easy walk if you don't want to fork out the US\$1 cab fare. Tucumán's **airport** (☎ 426-5072) is 8km east of downtown. Catch bus 120, which passes the center on the way to the bus terminal (US\$1). A taxi there will cost US\$4.

Information

ATMs are numerous.

Maguiter (San Martín 765) Cashes traveler's checks (2% commission).

Post office (cnr 25 de Mayo & Córdoba)

Tourist office (☎ 430-3644; Av 24 de Septiembre 484) On Plaza Independencia. There's also a booth at the bus terminal.

Sights

Spectacularly lit up at night, Tucumán's most imposing landmark is the **Casa de Gobierno**, which replaced the colonial *cabildo* on Plaza Independencia in 1912.

Museo Folklórico Manuel Belgrano (Av 24 de Septiembre 565; admission free; ☎ 9am-12:30pm) displays horse gear, indigenous musical instruments, weavings, woodcarvings, Quilmes pottery and samples of *randa* (a Puerto Rican lace technique that doesn't require a bobbin to sew it, only a needle and thread). The museum shop sells some items.

Casa del Obispo Colombres (Parque 9 de Julio; ☎ 8am-noon & 4-8pm) is an 18th-century house that preserves the first ox-powered *trapiche* (sugar mill) of Tucumán's postindependence industry. Guided tours in Spanish explain the mill's operations.

Activities

Rappelling, trekking, mountain biking, horse-riding and rafting are just some of the options for stuff to do in the mountains around Tucumán. **Montañas Tucumanas** (☎ 1560-93336; <http://montanastucumanas.com>; Catamarca 375) offers regular day and multiday trips to do all these, plus customized tours.

Sleeping

Tucumán Hostel (☎ 420-1584; www.tucumanhostel.com; Buenos Aires 669; dm/d US\$6/13; P) By far the best of Tucumán's hostels, in a beautifully

redone old building with a fully equipped kitchen, good common areas and bar. Guests are eligible for discounts at restaurants and bars around town and it organizes paragliding and canoeing trips.

Hotel La Vasca (☎ 421-1288; Mendoza 289; s/d US\$8/11) A good budget choice, the La Vasca's rooms have classy hardwood furniture and face a pretty courtyard. Bathrooms are aging, but well maintained.

Hotel Petit (☎ 421-3902; Crisóstomo Álvarez 765; s/d US\$9/16) With a maze of leafy patios, this place is definitely the best budget hotel in town. Rooms with shared bathroom are cheaper, but paying a bit more gets you cable TV, too.

Hotel Presidente (☎ 431-1414; www.tucuman.com/hotelpresidente; Monteguado 249; s/d US\$27/34; P) A modern, comfortable hotel near the center, the Presidente is perhaps the best hotel in this price range. Some would say that two swimming pools are excessive, but that's just the way they do things here.

Eating & Drinking

Stalls at the Mercado del Norte, with an entrance at the corner of Mendoza and Maipú, serve good cheap food and great pizza.

Custumbres Argentinos (San Jaun 666; mains US\$1-4) The food here is decent enough, but the real reason to come is the atmosphere: there's an excellent beer garden out back and live music Thursday to Sunday nights.

Plaza de Almas (Maipú 791; mains US\$3-5) Although it can seat well over a hundred people, the well-designed spaces here, spread out over three levels indoors and out, maintain an intimate atmosphere. The menu is simple but creative, with a range of kebabs, meat dishes and salads on offer.

El Portal (Av 24 de Septiembre; mains US\$3-10) Half a block east of Plaza Independencia, this rustic indoor/outdoor eatery has a tiny (six items) menu, but is an excellent place to try regional specialties like *locro* and *humitas*.

The stretch of Calle Lillo to the west of the market between La Madrid and San Lorenzo (known as El Abasto) is the place to go out; it's basically five blocks of pubs, discos and bars. This area really only kicks from Wednesday to Saturday, but when it does, it really does.

Getting There & Around

Aerolíneas Argentinas (☎ 431-1030; www.aerolineasargentinas.com; 9 de Julio 110) flies daily to Buenos Aires (US\$110).

Tucumán's **bus terminal** (☎ 422-2221; Brígido Terán 350) has a post office, *locutorios*, a supermarket, bars and restaurants, all blissfully air-conditioned.

Aconquija goes to Tafí del Valle (US\$4, 2½ hours), and to Cafayate (US\$9, seven hours).

Long-distance destinations include Santiago del Estero (US\$4, two hours), Córdoba (US\$13, eight hours), Salta (US\$8, 4½ hours), Corrientes (US\$20, 12 hours), La Rioja (US\$10, five hours) and Buenos Aires (US\$35, 16 hours).

TAFÍ DEL VALLE

☎ 03867 / pop 4000

Set in a pretty valley overlooking a lake, Tafí is where folks from Tucumán come to escape the heat in summer months. Off-season it's much mellower (which isn't to imply that there's any sort of frenzy here in summertime), but still gorgeous and makes a good base for exploring the surrounding countryside and nearby ruins at Quilmes (p104).

Information

The helpful **Casa del Turista** (☎ 421-084) is in Tafí's central plaza. **Banco Tucumán** (Miguel Critto) has an ATM.

Sights & Activities

At 2000m, a temperate island in a subtropical sea, Tafí produces some exceedingly good handmade cheese and the **cheese festival** held during the second week in February is well worth a look (and, possibly, a nibble). At **Parque Los Menhires**, at the south end of La Angostura reservoir, stand more than 80 indigenous granite monuments collected from nearby archaeological sites. Some say they resemble the standing stones of the Scottish Hebrides.

Sleeping & Eating

Autocamping del Sauce (☎ 421-084; campsites/cabañas per person US\$2/3) The tiny cabañas with bunks would be very cramped at their maximum capacity of four people.

Hostel la Cumbre (☎ 421-768; Perón 120; www.lacumbretafidelvalle.com; dm/d US\$7/14) These basic rooms set around a cheery courtyard are the pick of Tafí's budget options. The owner has loads of information on tours and hikes in the area (as well as a good little tour company) and there's a cozy TV room.

Hostería Huayra Puca (☎ 421-190; www.huayrapuca.com.ar; Menhires 71; s/d US\$20/27; ☎) Set in a light and airy building of interesting design, this place offers comfortable, good-sized rooms. Multilingual staff, loads of local information and transfers to and from Tucumán are other bonuses.

Don Pepino (Juan de Perón; mains US\$3-5) The coziest of the *parrilla* options, usually featuring live entertainment at mealtimes. If you've been hanging out to try *chivo a la parrilla* (barbecued goat), this is probably the place to do it.

Getting Around

Mountain bikes can be rented from the elegant **Hotel Rosada** (Belgrano 322) for US\$1 an hour.

CAFAYATE

☎ 03868 / pop 11,800

Set at the entrance to the Quebrada de Cafayate, 1600m above sea level and surrounded by some of the country's best vineyards, Cafayate provides the opportunity to indulge in two of life's great pleasures: drinking wine and exploring nature. If you're pressed for time, you can combine the two and take a bottle out into the Quebrada with you, in which case we would recommend a local *torrontés*, provided you can keep it chilled.

February's **La Serenata** music festival draws big crowds.

Information

The tourist information kiosk is at the northeast corner of Plaza San Martín.

Sights

The **Museo de Vitivinicultura** (Güemes; admission US\$50¢; ☎ 10am-1pm & 5-8pm Mon-Fri), near Colón, details the history of local wines. Three central **bodegas** (wine cellars) and three nearby vineyards offer tours and tasting; try the fruity white *torrontés*. From 25 de Mayo, a 5km walk southwest leads you to the Río Colorado. Follow the river upstream for about two hours to get to a 10m **waterfall**, where you can swim. Look out for hidden rock paintings on the way (for a small tip, local children will guide you).

Sleeping & Eating

Camping Lorahuasi (☎ 421-051; per car, person & tent US\$1) Has hot showers, a swimming pool and a grocery.

Hostel El Balcon (☎ 421-739; Pasaje 20 de Febrero 110; dm/d US\$5/15) This wonderful hostel does indeed have a good balcony, and also light, airy common rooms, a well-stocked kitchen and an excellent rooftop patio. It also organizes some of the best tours of the Quebrada and local sights, as well as having a wealth of do-it-yourself options to keep you entertained.

Hostal Killa (☎ 422-254; hostalkillacafayate@hotmail.com; Colón 47; s/d US\$24/29) One of the most comfortable options in town are the sunny and spacious rooms in this converted colonial house. The whole place has been beautifully restored and there's a stylishly rustic breakfast/sitting area out back.

Cheap eats can be found at the various *comedores* inside the **Mercado Central** (San Martín & 11 de Noviembre). Restaurants around the plaza do good regional dishes at reasonable prices.

Rincon de los Amigos (San Martín 25; mains US\$3-7) The shady sidewalk tables looking out over the plaza here are a good place to try regional dishes like grilled goat (US\$4) and *locro* (US\$2).

Baco (Güemes & Rivadavia; meals US\$4-7) Crammed full of rustic decorations, this is the most frequently recommended restaurant in town. It serves up interesting variations on Argentine standards and a good selection of local wines for around US\$6 per bottle.

Heladería Miranda (Güemes btwn Córdoba & Almagro; per scoop from US45¢) This place sells imaginative wine-flavored ice cream with a considerable alcoholic kick.

Getting There & Around

El Indio (Belgrano btwn Güemes & Salta) has buses to Salta (US\$7, 3½ hours), San Carlos (US\$1, 40 minutes), up the Vallee Calchaquíes, and Angastaco (US\$2.50, two hours).

Take one of the daily buses to Santa María to visit the ruins at Quilmes (right), in Tucumán province. **El Aconquija** (cnr Güemes & Alvarado) has departures to Tucumán (US\$9, seven hours), passing through Tafi del Valle.

Bike rental from **Hostel El Balcon** (☎ 421-739; Pasaje 20 de Febrero 110) costs US\$3 a day.

AROUND CAFAYATE

Quebrada de Cafayate

From Cafayate, RN 68 slices through the Martian-like landscape of the Quebrada de Cafayate on its way to Salta. About 50km north of Cafayate, the eastern Sierra de Carahuasi is the backdrop for distinctive sandstone landforms like the Garganta del Diablo (Devil's

Throat), El Anfiteatro (Amphitheater), El Sapo (Toad), El Fraile (Friar), El Obelisco (Obelisk) and Los Castillos (Castles).

Other than car rental or organized tours, the best way to see the Quebrada is by bike or on foot. Bring plenty of water and go in the morning, as unpleasant, strong winds kick up in the afternoon. At Cafayate, cyclists can load their bikes onto any El Indio bus heading to Salta and disembark at the impressive box canyon of Garganta del Diablo. From here, the 50-odd kilometers back to Cafayate can be biked in about four hours, but it's too far on foot. When they've had enough, walkers should simply hail down another El Indio bus on its way back to Cafayate.

Valles Calchaquíes

In this valley north and south of Cafayate, once a principal route across the Andes, the Calchaquí people resisted Spanish attempts to impose forced labor obligations. Tired of having to protect their pack trains, the Spaniards relocated many Calchaquí to Buenos Aires, and the land fell to Spaniards, who formed large rural estates.

CACHI

☎ 03868 / pop 5200

Cachi is a spectacularly beautiful town and by far the most visually impressive of those along the Valles Calchaquíes. There's not a whole lot to do here, but that's all part of the charm.

For accommodations, check out the **municipal campground & hostel** (campsites/dm US\$2/4) or **Hotel Nevado de Cachi** (☎ 491-004; r per person US\$3), a modest, good-value hotel. The best hotel in town is the **Hostería Cachi** (☎ 491-105; www.soldelvalle.com.ar; s/d US\$30/40; P, ♿, 📶), with an excellent hilltop location and stylish modern rooms. Cheap restaurants surround the plaza.

You can only reach Cachi from Cafayate if you have your own transport or are prepared to hitchhike a stretch of RN 40 between Angastaco and Molinos. It's easier to take a bus from Salta (US\$7, four hours), via the scenic Cuesta del Obispo route past Parque Nacional Los Cardones.

QUILMES

This pre-Hispanic **pucará** (indigenous Andean fortress; admission US\$1), in Tucumán province, 50km south of Cafayate, is Argentina's most extensive preserved ruin. Dating from about AD 1000,

this complex urban settlement covered about 30 hectares, housing perhaps 5000 people. The Quilmes people abided contact with the Incas but could not outlast the Spaniards, who, in 1667, deported the last 2000 to Buenos Aires.

Quilmes' thick walls underscore its defensive functions, but evidence of dense occupation sprawls north and south of the nucleus.

Parador Ruinas de Quilmes (☎ 03892-421-075; s/d US\$30/40) also has a restaurant.

Buses from Cafayate to Santa María pass the Quilmes junction, but from there, it's 5km to the ruins by foot or thumb.

SALTA

☎ 0387 / pop 465,000

Salta has experienced a huge surge in popularity as a backpacking destination over the last few years, and rightly so – the setting's gorgeous, the hostels are attractive, the nightlife pumps and there's plenty to do in and around town.

Orientation

Salta's commercial center is southwest of the central Plaza 9 de Julio. Alberdi and Florida are pedestrian malls between Caseros and Av San Martín. Bus 5 connects the train station, downtown and bus terminal.

Information

There are ATMs downtown.

Administración de Parques Nacionales (APN; ☎ 431-2686; España 366, 3rd fl) Has information on the province's national parks.

Cambio Dinar (Mitre 101) Changes cash and traveler's checks.

Municipal tourist office (☎ 437-3341; cnr Av San Martín & Buenos Aires) Runs an information kiosk in the bus terminal in high season.

Post office (Deán Funes 140)

Provincial tourist office (☎ 431-0950; Buenos Aires 93) Very central.

Sights

CERRO SAN BERNARDO

For spectacular views of Salta and the Lerma valley, take the **teleférico** (gondola; round trip US\$3) from Parque San Martín, or climb the winding staircase trail that starts behind the Güemes monument.

MUSEUMS

The **Museo de Arqueología de Alta Montaña** (Mitre 77; admission US\$3; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3-8pm) documents the

amazing discovery of three mummies found at an altitude of 6700m on the Llullailaco volcano. The climate kept the bodies and a collection of textiles and sacred objects almost perfectly preserved.

The **Museo de Artes Contemporaneo** (Zuviría 90; admission US30¢; ☎ 9am-1pm & 4:30-8:30pm) exhibits the work of contemporary artists from the city, as well as Argentine and international artists. The space itself is world-class, well lit and expertly curated. Exhibits change rapidly, so it's always worthwhile popping in to see what's on offer.

CHURCHES

The 19th-century **Iglesia Catedral** (España 596) guards the ashes of General Martín Miguel de Güemes, a hero of the wars of independence. So ornate it's almost gaudy, the **Iglesia San Francisco** (cnr Caseros & Córdoba) is a Salta landmark. Only Carmelite nuns can enter the 16th-century adobe **Convento de San Bernardo** (cnr Caseros & Santa Fe) but anyone can admire its carved *algarrobo* (carob tree wood) door or peek inside the chapel during Mass, held at 8am daily.

EL TREN A LAS NUBES

From Salta, the Tren a las Nubes (Train to the Clouds) makes countless switchbacks and spirals to ascend the Quebrada del Toro and reach the high *puna* (Andean plateau). The La Polvorilla viaduct, crossing a broad desert canyon, is a magnificent engineering achievement at 4220m above sea level.

Turismo Tren a las Nubes (☎ 401-2000; Buenos Aires 44) operates full-day excursions as far as La Polvorilla; most trips take place on Saturday only from April to November, but can be more frequent during July holidays. The US\$70 fare does not include meals, which cost around US\$7.

Activities

White-water rafting outside of town is available with **Salta Rafting** (☎ 401-0301; www.saltrafting.com; Buenos Aires 88 loc 13) from US\$32 for a half-day or US\$50 with a canopy tour included. **Extreme Games** (☎ 422-2394; www.extremegame.todowebsalta.com.ar; Buenos Aires 68 loc 1) can take care of all your bungee-jumping (US\$28), jetski (US\$12), horse-riding (from US\$21), paragliding (US\$50) and kite-buggy (US\$60) requirements. If that all sounds a bit full-on for you, paddleboats are available on the

SALTA

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To Camping Municipal Carlos Xamena (2km); Airport (9km); San Antonio de los Cobres

lake in Parque San Martín for US\$2 for 20 minutes.

Sleeping

Camping Municipal Carlos Xamena (☎ 423-1341; Libano; campsites per person/tent US\$1/1; 🚻) Features a gigantic swimming pool. Take bus 3B from the corner of Mendoza and Lerma near the bus terminal.

Hostal Salta (☎ 431-7191; Balcarce 980; dm/r US\$6/15; 🚻) Smack in the middle of Salta's *zona viva*, and offering discounts and 'excursions' to local pubs and clubs, this one's definitely the party animal's choice. Rooms are surprisingly quiet, although they lack decent ventilation.

Terra Oculta Youth Hostel (☎ 421-8769; Córdoba 361; dm/d US\$7/15; 🚻) A real 'backpacker's' vibe.

Dorms are spacious; there's a Ping-Pong table, cheap internet access and two kitchens. A sunny roof terrace with bar and BBQ are further bonuses.

Hostel Catedral (☎ 422-7843; Alvarado 532; s/d US\$17/20) The staff may well be distant relations of the Addams family, but the rooms are good, the bathrooms clean and the central location here is a winner.

Hotel Colonial (☎ 431-0805; www.hotelcolonialsalta.com.ar; Zuviría 6; s/d US\$20/27) This classic building on the plaza is aging, but loaded with character. The furniture has obviously been there since day one (check the sponge factor on your mattress, for that matter), but the balconies have plaza views, there's a delightfully bright and cheery breakfast



area and even a saloon/piano bar (with piano).

Eating & Drinking

The west side of Plaza 9 de Julio is lined with café/bars with tables out on the plaza; great spots for coffee, snacks or a few drinks.

Mercado Central (Av Florida & San Martín) At this large, lively market you can supplement inexpensive pizza, empanadas and *humitas* with fresh fruit and vegetables.

Madre Tierra (Alvarado 508; mains US\$3-4) Seriously good vegetarian food, with options along the lines of brown rice, tofu and seaweed.

New Time Café (cnr Mitre & Caseros; breakfast US\$1-2, snacks US\$2-4) The ultimate in plazaside cafés: shady tables, great views of the *cabildo*, Cerro

San Bernardo and cathedral, a leafy plaza across the way...they also serve coffee and food.

Viejo Jack (Av Virrey Toledo 139; mains US\$4-6) Warmly recommended by just about every local that you talk to for its *parrillada* and pasta dishes.

Frida (Balcarce 935; meals US\$5-7) A good selection of red and white meats (try the rabbit in mustard sauce – yum!), eclectic decor and a good wine list make this place one of the finer dining options in the area.

Balcarce south of the train station is Salta's very happening *zona viva* – four blocks stacked with restaurants, bars and clubs.

Smaller bars include **Uno** (Balcarce 996) and **Tabu** (Balcarce 869).

Entertainment

For the mega-disco experience, check out **XXU** (Balcarce 915) and **Inside Club** (Balcarce 836).

Getting There & Around

AIR

Aerolíneas Argentinas (☎ 431-1331; www.aerolineasargentinas.com; Caseros 475) flies daily to Buenos Aires (US\$120).

Dinar Líneas Aéreas (☎ 431-0500; Caseros 492) also flies daily to Buenos Aires (US\$120).

Lloyd Aéreo Boliviano (LAB; ☎ 431-0320; Caseros 529) flies Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday to Santa Cruz (Bolivia). **LanChile** (☎ 421-7330; Buenos Aires 88) has seasonal flights over the Andes.

Transport to Salta's **airport** (☎ 423-1648), 9km southwest of town on RP 51, leaves from airline offices about 1½ hours before the flight (US\$2).

BUS

Salta's **bus terminal** (☎ 401-1143; Hipólito Yrigoyen) is southeast of downtown.

Géminis services the Chilean destinations of San Pedro de Atacama (US\$45, 12½ hours) and Calama, Chile (US\$45, 14 hours) on Tuesday and Friday mornings, connecting to Antofagasta, Iquique and Arica.

There are daily departures to Cafayate (US\$5, 3½ hours). El Quebradeño leaves for San Antonio de los Cobres at 3pm daily (US\$5, five hours).

Empresa Marcos Rueda serves Cachi daily (US\$7, four hours); it also goes to Molinos daily except Tuesday and Thursday (US\$10, seven hours).

Long-distance services include Tucumán (US\$8, 4½ hours), La Quiaca (US\$10, seven

hours), Resistencia (US\$30, 14 hours), Rosario (US\$35, 16 hours), Mendoza (US\$30, 18 hours) and Buenos Aires (US\$42, 21 hours).

SAN ANTONIO DE LOS COBRES

☎ 0387 / pop 5400

This is a long way from BA in every sense: geographically, culturally and visually. The dominant color here is brown: the dirt roads, adobe houses, surrounding landscape. It's not a pretty place, but for travelers on the colonial pack trains to Peru crossing the Puna de Atacama to the Pacific on this route, San Antonio (3700m) must have seemed an oasis. Well into the 20th century, it was a stopover for drovers moving stock to Chile's nitrate mines, but railways and roads have now supplanted mules.

El Palenque (☎ 490-9019; Belgrano s/n; r per person with shared bathroom US\$5) is the most comfortable of the very basic budget accommodations here. Make sure you stock up on blankets, as nights can get very chilly.

With 12 rooms with private bathrooms, double-glazed windows, and a total of 30 beds, **Hostería de las Nubes** (☎ 490-9059; Caseros 441; s/d US\$18/25) is the only hotel worthy of the name in San Antonio. It also has a restaurant, central heating and a TV lounge.

One of the few actual restaurants in town, **Huari Huasi** (Belgrano s/n; meals US\$2.50-4) is pretty good. It offers filling meals in a cozy, simple environment.

Daily El Quebradeño buses make the trip from Salta to San Antonio (US\$5, five hours); the bus leaves San Antonio for Salta at 9am. It's probably easier (and faster) to catch a taxi in San Antonio for the return trip to Salta (US\$9 per person, based on at least four people sharing).

SAN SALVADOR DE JUJUY

☎ 0388 / pop 234,000

If you're heading north, Jujuy is the where you start to feel the proximity to Bolivia; you see it in people's faces, the chaotic street scenes, the markets that spill out onto sidewalks and restaurant menus, which offer *locro*, *humitas* and *sopa de mani* (spicy peanut soup) as a matter of course, rather than as 'regional specialties.'

Originally a key stopover for colonial mule-traders en route to Potosí, Jujuy played an important part in the wars of independence when General Manuel Belgrano directed the evacuation of the entire city to avoid royalist capture; every August Jujuy's biggest event,

the weeklong *Semana de Jujuy*, celebrates the **éxodo jujeño** (Jujuy exodus).

Orientation

The colonial center of the city (population 200,000) is Plaza Belgrano. Belgrano (the main commercial street) is partly a pedestrian mall. To get to the center from the bus terminal, walk north along Av Dorrego and across the river, keeping the hill at your back.

Information

Staff at the **provincial tourist office** (☎ 422-1326; Av Urquiza 354) in the old railway station are helpful and have abundant maps and brochures on hand.

ATMs are common on Belgrano and banks should be able to change traveler's checks. The post office is at the corner of Lamadrid and Independencia.

Sights

Opposite Plaza Belgrano, Jujuy's **Iglesia Catedral** (1763) features a gold-laminated Spanish baroque pulpit, built by local artisans under a European master. In a small square next to the church is the **Paseo de los Artesanos** (9am-12:30pm & 3-6pm), a colorful arts market. On the south side of Plaza Belgrano, the imposing **Casa de Gobierno** is built in the style of a French palace and houses Argentina's first national flag. On the north side of the plaza, the colonial **cabildo** deserves more attention than the **Museo Policial** within.

Museo Histórico Provincial (Lavalle 256; admission US\$50¢; ☎ 8am-12:30pm & 4-8pm) has rooms dedicated to distinct themes in provincial history.

Museo Arqueológico Provincial (Lavalle 434; admission free; ☎ 8am-1pm & 2-9pm) If you have even a basic grasp of Spanish, this museum is well worth your while: the guided tour is excellent and the strong emphasis on shamanism in the area fascinating. If not, the poorly labeled exhibits will probably leave you a bit cold.

Don't leave Jujuy without wallowing in the **thermal baths** (admission US\$1; ☎ 9am-7pm) at **Hostería Termas de Reyes**, 20km northwest of downtown, overlooking the scenic canyon of the Río Reyes. Look for the bus leaving the north side of the bus terminal with 'Termas de Reyes' on the placard. Bring food, since the *hostería's* restaurant is expensive.

Sleeping

Camping El Refugio (☎ 490-9344; per tent US\$1 & per person US\$1) About 3km west of downtown.



Bus 9 goes there from downtown or the bus terminal.

Residencial Chung King (☎ 422-8142; Alvear 627; s/d US\$8/10) Good rooms, but make sure you're at the back away from the noisy restaurant downstairs. This is the best budget option near the city center; it's a poky little place and some rooms are better than others. Have a look at a few.

Casa de Barro (☎ 422-9578; www.casadebarro.com.ar; Otero 294; r per person with shared bathroom US\$8) Beautifully decorated with indigenous motif stencils on the walls and rustic room fittings, this place adds a touch of class to Jujuy's otherwise workaday hotel scene.

Hotel Jujuy Palace (☎ 423-0433; jpallace@imagine.com.ar; Belgrano 1060; s/d US\$38/48; P ♿) If you've got a bit extra to spend, it's well worth getting a room at the Palace. The large rooms are spacious and modern, tastefully decorated with terrific views and the bathrooms feature good-sized tubs.

Eating & Drinking

Mercado Municipal (cnr Alvear & Balcarce) Upstairs, several eateries serve inexpensive regional

specialties that are generally spicier than elsewhere in Argentina; try *chicharrón con mote* (stir-fried pork with boiled maize).

Los Dos Chinos (Alvear 735; mains US\$2-5) The excellent, old-man pool hall atmosphere at this neighborhood *confitería* is added to by the existence of pool tables out the back. *Minutas*, cheap breakfasts and good coffee are on the menu.

Chung King (Alvear 627; mains US\$3-7) An extensive Argentine menu and fine service. Its *rotisería* and pizzeria next door are good budget options.

Madre Tierra (Belgrano 619; 4-course lunch US\$3.50) An Argentine standout. The vegetarian food is excellent and the salads, crepes and soups can be washed down with either carrot or apple juice. It's an earthy place where the simple, wholesome, home-cooked food makes a welcome change to the standard Argentine fare.

Zorba (cnr Necochea & Belgrano; mains US\$5-8) Seriously good Greek food (yes, you read that right) in the middle of Jujuy! It's all here: the salads, the dolmades, the *koftas* (balls of ground vegetables). Fans of the big breakfast will want to check out the Americano – it has

one of pretty much everything you could hope for to start the day.

As far as drinking in Jujuy goes, you have two options: ultrahip and minimalist at **Carena** (cnr Balcarce & Belgrano; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) or down-home and rowdy at the *peña* **Savoy** (cnr Alvear & Gorriti; ☎ Thu-Sat), where live folkloric music goes into the wee hours.

Getting There & Around

AIR

Aerolíneas Argentinas (☎ 422-2575; www.aerolineasargentinas.com; Belgrano 1056), flies to Buenos Aires (US\$120) Tuesday to Friday.

Jujuy's **airport** (☎ 491-1103) is 32km south-east of town. The airline provides transport to the airport.

BUS

Jujuy's scruffy **bus terminal** (☎ 422-1375; cnr Av Dorrego & Iguazú), blends in with the Mercado del Sur. It has provincial and long-distance services, but Salta has more alternatives.

Chile-bound buses from Salta to Calama (US\$33 to US\$40; prices depend on whether you're traveling on a day or night bus) stop in Jujuy Tuesdays and Fridays. Make reservations in advance at the Géminis office at the terminal.

El Quiaqueño goes to La Quiaca (US\$7, five hours), Humahuaca (US\$3.50, two hours) and Tilcara (US\$3, two hours). Cota Norte goes daily to Libertador General San Martín (US\$3, two hours), for access to Parque Nacional Calilegua.

Long-distance fares include Salta (US\$3, 2½ hours), Tucumán (US\$10, five hours), Córdoba (US\$25, 13½ hours), Mendoza (US\$32, 14 hours), Resistencia (US\$26, 14 hours) and Buenos Aires (US\$40, 20 hours).

QUEBRADA DE HUMAHUACA

North of Jujuy, RN 9 snakes its way through the Quebrada de Humahuaca, a painter's palette of color on barren hillsides, dwarfing hamlets where Quechua peasants scratch a living from growing maize and raising scrawny livestock. On this colonial post-route to Potosí, the architecture and other cultural features mirror Peru and Bolivia.

Earthquakes leveled many of the adobe churches, but they were often rebuilt in the 17th and 18th centuries with solid walls, simple bell towers, and striking doors and wood paneling from the *cardón* cactus.

Tilcara

☎ 0388 / pop 5600

The most comfortable of the Quebrada towns, Tilcara is also one of the prettiest, and hosts a number of fine eating and sleeping options.

Tilcara's hilltop *pucará*, a pre-Hispanic fortress with unobstructed views, is its most conspicuous attraction, but the village's museums and its reputation as an artists colony help make it an appealing stopover. The tourist office in the municipal offices distributes a useful map. Banco Macro, on the plaza, has an ATM.

SIGHTS

The well-organized **Museo Arqueológico Dr Eduardo Casanova** (Belgrano 445; admission US\$1, Tue free; ☎ 9am-12:30pm & 2-6pm), run by the Universidad de Buenos Aires, features some artifacts from the site of the *pucará*. The room dedicated to ceremonial masks and their manufacture is particularly impressive. The museum is located in a striking colonial house on the south side of Plaza Prado. Admission is also good for El Pucará.

The **Museo José Antonio Terry** (Rivadavia 459; admission US\$2, Thu free; ☎ closed Mon) features the work of a Buenos Aires-born painter whose themes were largely rural and indigenous; his oils depict native weavers, market and street scenes, and portraits. Also featured is work from local artists, and the occasional traveling exhibition of contemporary art.

Rising above the sediments of the Río Grande valley, an isolated hill is the site of **El Pucará** (admission US\$1), 1km south of central Tilcara. There are fantastic views of the valley from the top of the fort, which has been brilliantly reconstructed in parts. The admission fee includes entry to the Museo Arqueológico Dr Eduardo Casanova.

Only a few kilometers south of Tilcara, the hillside cemetery of **Maimará** is a can't-miss photo opportunity.

SLEEPING & EATING

Autocamping El Jardín (☎ 495-5128; campsites per person US\$2) At the west end of Belgrano near the river, with hot showers and attractive vegetable and flower gardens.

Albergue Malka (☎ 495-5197; tilcara@hostels.org.ar; dm US\$8) Excellent hilltop accommodations on lovingly landscaped grounds four blocks from Plaza Prado at the east end of San Martín. It's about a 10-minute walk from the center.

CHILDREN OF THE CARNIVAL

In early 2006 the Argentine government initiated a ground-breaking sex-education and condom-distribution program in the towns of the northwest. This was in response to the fact that, nine months after Carnival is celebrated in these towns (a time when alcohol consumption goes up and inhibitions go down), an unusually high number of babies are born to single, teenage mothers. The people in these towns have long known about this phenomenon, of course, and they have a special name for babies born in late November/early December – *los hijos del carnaval* (children of the carnival).

Discounts are available for HI cardholders. The owners can arrange trekking and vehicle tours of the Quebrada.

Posada de Luz (☎ 495-5017; www.posadadeluz.com.ar; Ambrosetti & Alverro; r US\$30-40; P ♿) With a nouveau-rustic charm, this little place is spectacular. More expensive rooms have sitting areas, but all feature pot-bellied stoves and individual terraces with great views out over the valley. A fantastic place to unwind for a few days.

El Cafecito (cnr Belgrano & Rivadavia) This little place is a very agreeable spot for coffee and croissants, and the homemade cakes (US\$1) are worth keeping an eye out for.

La Chacana (Paseo Tierra Azul; mains US\$3-5) With indoor and outdoor seating (in a very Zen patio), La Chacana has the most interesting menu in town, featuring quinoa, wild mushrooms and local herbs.

ENTERTAINMENT

La Peñalta (Rivadavia s/n) A folkloric *peña* (folk club) with live music on the north side of Plaza Prado.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

Both northbound and southbound buses leave from the bus terminal on Exodo, three blocks west of Plaza Prado. Sample destinations include Jujuy (US\$3, two hours), Humahuaca (US\$1.50, 40 minutes) and La Quiaca (US\$5, four hours).

Bike rental can be arranged opposite Auto-camping El Jardín for US\$1/7 per hour/day. The bike-rental place also provides good area maps for day-trip options.

Humahuaca

☎ 03887 / pop 11,400

A popular stopover on the Salta–Bolivia route, Humahuaca is a mostly Quechuan village of narrow cobbled streets lined with adobe houses. There's plenty to do in the surrounding countryside and the town provides some great photo opportunities.

INFORMATION

The **tourist office** (cnr Tucumán & Jujuy) in the *cabildo* is rarely open, but Federico Briones, who runs El Portillo (p112), is a good source of local information, can organize trekking in the Quebrada and speaks English. The post office is across from the plaza.

SIGHTS

From the clock tower in the **cabildo**, a life-size figure of San Francisco Solano emerges daily at noon. Make sure you arrive early, because the clock is erratic and the figure appears only very briefly.

Humahuaca's patron saint resides in the colonial **Iglesia de la Candelaria**, which contains 18th-century oil paintings by Cuzco painter Marcos Sapaca. Overlooking the town is Tilcara sculptor Ernesto Soto Avendaño's **Monumento a la Independencia**.

Museo Folklórico Regional (Buenos Aires 435/447; admission US\$3.50) is run by local writer Sixto Vázquez Zuleta (who prefers his Quechua name 'Toqo'). It's open for formal tours only.

Ten kilometers north of Humahuaca by a dirt road on the east side of the bridge over the Río Grande, northwestern Argentina's most extensive pre-Columbian **ruins** cover 40 hectares at **Coctaca**. Many appear to be broad agricultural terraces on an alluvial fan, but there are also obvious outlines of clusters of buildings.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Carnaval celebrations are particularly boisterous here, and on February 2, the village holds a **festival** in honor of the town's patron saint, the Virgen de la Candelaria.

TOURS

Turismo Hasta las Manos (☎ 421-075; www.hlmexpeditions.com.ar; Barrio Milagrosa) is a young tour company specializing in unconventional tour options in the region, including sandboarding and trekking to remote locations. It also hires bikes for US\$2/10 per hour/day.

SLEEPING & EATING

Posada del Sol (☎ 421-466; Barrio Milagrosa s/n; dm/d US\$7/17) Just 400m across the bridge, Posada del Sol is a funky adobe place with beautifully designed rooms, all with shared bathroom. There is a well-stocked kitchen, and you can call to get them to pick you up from the bus terminal.

Residencial Humahuaca (☎ 421-141; Córdoba 401; s/d US\$13/20) There's nothing too exciting about this place, but it's clean, and comfortable and close to the plaza and bus terminal.

El Portillo (Tucumán 69; mains US\$3-5) A simple but good menu in rustic surrounds. If you've got a hankering for llama stew, this is probably the place to try it. Live music is on offer nightly from 8pm.

There's an acceptable confitería at the bus terminal, but on Belgrano, very close to the bus terminal, is El Rancho Confitería, a better alternative for coffee and a light meal.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

From the **bus terminal** (cnr Belgrano & Entre Ríos) there are several departures to Salta (US\$6, five hours) and Jujuy (US\$3.50, two hours), and northbound buses to La Quiaca (US\$4, three hours).

LA QUIACA

☎ 03885 / pop 15,000

There really is no reason to be here unless you're headed for Bolivia. That said, if you arrive late at night, it's best to stay here as



the services are much better than across the border in Villazón (see p226).

La Quiaca has no tourist office, but the ACA station on RN 9 has maps. If Banco de la Nación will not cash traveler's checks, try Universo Tours in Villazón. The post office is at the corner of Av Sarmiento and San Juan.

If you're here in mid-October, you might luck onto the **Manca Fiesta** when *campesinos* (rural dwellers) pour in from the surrounding countryside to barter goods and dance.

Sleeping & Eating

Hotel Frontera (☎ 422-269; cnr Belgrano & República de Árabe Siria; s/d with shared bathroom US\$4/6) You can tell from the prices that there's nothing fancy going on here, but it's OK for a night and the restaurant out front is good, cheap and popular.

Hostería Munay (☎ 423-924; www.munayhotel.jujuy.com in Spanish; Belgrano 51-61; d per person US\$5) Not as good value as it used to be, but quiet and central in La Quiaca. Rooms with bathroom, TV and breakfast also available (\$13).

Hotel de Turismo (☎ 422-243; cnr Av San Martín & República de Árabe Siria; s/d US\$13/22) The best place to stay in town has parquet floors, a plant-filled lobby and good spacious rooms with TV, telephone and reading lights.

Parrillada La Cabaña (España 550) The best thing about this place is that it's open all day for snacks and light meals. The set lunch (US\$2.50) is an absolute bargain.

Confitería La Frontera (Belgrano & República de Árabe Siria; everything under US\$2) An old-school diner where four-course set meals fetch US\$2.

Getting There & Away

From the **bus terminal** (cnr Belgrano & Av España), there are frequent connections to Jujuy (US\$7, five hours), Salta (US\$10, seven hours) and intermediate points, plus long-distance services.

AROUND LA QUIACA

At the village of **Yavi**, 16km east of La Quiaca, the 17th-century **Iglesia de San Francisco** is renowned for its altar, paintings, carved statues and gold leaf-covered pulpit. The nearby **Casa del Marqués Campero** belonged to a nobleman whose marriage to the holder of the original *encomienda* created a family that dominated the region's economy in the 18th century.

Friendly **Hostal de Yavi** (☎ 03887-490-508; hostal deyavi@hotmail.com; Güemes 222; dm/s/d US\$5/15/23) has clean facilities in a cozy building.

Regular buses go from La Quiaca to Yavi (US\$5, 1½ hours), but shared cabs (US\$5 round trip, including waiting time) are another alternative. Every half hour or so, there's a pickup truck (US\$1) that runs from La Quiaca's Mercado Municipal on Hipólito Yrigoyen.

ATLANTIC COAST

The beaches along the Atlantic coast form Buenos Aires' backyard, and summer sees millions of *porteños* pouring into towns like Mar del Plata and Pinamar for sun and fun. The rest of the year, and in smaller towns, the pace of life rarely approaches anything resembling hectic.

MAR DEL PLATA

☎ 0223 / pop 512,000

On summer weekends, the beach in Mardel (as it's commonly known) gets really, seriously comically crowded. We're talking people standing shoulder to shoulder, knee-deep in water. During the week, and in the non-summer months, the crowds disperse, hotel prices drop and the place takes on a much more relaxed feel.

Founded in 1874, this most popular of Argentine beach destinations is 400km south of Buenos Aires. First a commercial and industrial center, then a resort for upper-class *porteño* families, Mardel now caters mostly to middle-class vacationers.

Filled with skyscrapers built without much planning, this city also has charming older buildings and neighborhoods left over from its elite days. The wide and attractive beach bustles with activity during summer, there are some interesting museums in town, and nightlife can be just as kick-ass as Buenos Aires.

Orientation

South of town, the salty port offers close-up viewing of a sea lion colony (you'll smell 'em before you see 'em). The airport is 9km northwest of town (take bus 542); taxis there cost US\$5, more in summer. To get from the bus terminal to the center, take the 511 bus, a taxi (US\$2) or walk 20 minutes.

Information

The **tourist office** (☎ 495-1777; Blvd Marítimo 2240) is near Plaza Colón. Most *cambios*, banks and

GETTING TO BOLIVIA

The border is a 1km walk from the bus terminal. There is no public transport, but if there's a taxi around, they should be able to take you for US\$1. The border is open 6am to 8pm daily. For info on entering Argentina from Bolivia, see p227.

ATMs are near the intersections of San Martín/Córdoba and Avs Independencia/Luro.

Sights

Now the Italian consulate, 1919 **Villa Normandy** (Viamonte 2216) is one of few surviving examples of the French style that was *en vogue* in the 1950s. A block away near the top of the hill, **Iglesia Stella Maris** has an impressive marble altar; its virgin is the patron saint of local fishermen. On the summit, **Torre Tanque** offers outstanding views.

Museo del Mar (admission US\$2; ☎ 9am-2am Dec-Mar, 8am-9pm Mon-Thu, 8am-midnight Fri & Sat, 9am-9pm Sun Apr-Nov), opposite Villa Normandy, is probably the most extensive seashell museum you'll ever see. Based around central cafés on two floors are a small tide pool and an aquarium. It's a good place to rest and have tea.

Activities

Oceania Expediciones (☎ 480-0323; Yacht Club, Puerto) hosts scuba-diving trips from US\$33 per dive, including equipment.

Paracaidismo Mar del Plata (☎ 464-2151) offers tandem parachute jumps for US\$93 and video-tapes the experience for US\$30.

Catamaran Regina Australe (☎ 486-4879; www.reginaaustrale.com.ar; Playa Grande) offers 1½-hour cruises around the bay for US\$8 and dinner cruises on weekends for US\$20. Call for free pickup from the center.

Sleeping

Prices are about 30% higher in January and February, when it's worth making reservations.

Rates at Mardel's crowded campgrounds, mostly south of town, are around US\$2 per person; the tourist office prints out information about their facilities.

Hotel Pergamino (☎ 495-7927; hotelpergamino@ciudad.com.ar; Tucumán 2728; dm/s/d US\$6/12/18) The best thing about this hotel is the range of rooms on offer: dorms, cheap tiny singles, all the way up to very comfortable doubles.

Casa Grande (☎ 476-0805; www.casagrandealbergue.com.ar; Jujuy 947; dm/d US\$7/20; ☎) Truly a big house, this is part of the welcome 'new wave' of hostels in Mardel – run by travelers, with plenty of activity options including tango and salsa classes and yoga sessions.

Casa Santiago (☎ 491-9759; Santiago del Estero 1342; dm/s/d US\$7/10/20; ☎) This intimate hostel (capacity 17) has a great garden area and well-equipped kitchen. Book well ahead if you're coming in summer.

Eating

There are many *tenedor libres* in the center of town for US\$4 to US\$5, not including drinks. They're a great deal if you're a big eater.

Moringa (Alsina 2561; mains US\$4-5) This upscale Middle Eastern restaurant serves an excellent assortment of authentic dishes including falafel, kebbe and shish kebabs. Saturday nights feature dinner and belly dancers for US\$9.

Centro Vasco Denak Bat (Moreno 3440; mains US\$5-8) If there's one thing the Basques know how to do, that would be cook great seafood dishes. If there's another thing, it would be to decorate their restaurants in an atmospheric, rustic dining saloon kind of way. If the prices downstairs seem hefty, try sneaking into the members' *comedor* upstairs, where the food's the same, only cheaper.

Piedra Buena (Centro Comercial Puerto; meals US\$7-11) Of the bunch of seafood restaurants down at the port, this is reputedly the best, and is certainly the most atmospheric. There's a huge range of seafood on offer, a good atmosphere and a seafood bisque (US\$8) that comes highly recommended.

Drinking

La Bodeguita del Medio (Castelli 1252) This bar takes a fair stab at the whole Cuban thing: there's plenty of graffiti and photos on the walls, two for one *mojitos* every day from 7pm to 9pm and a range of Cuban dishes like *ropa vieja* (shredded beef, tomatoes and onions), *moros y cristianos* (white rice with black beans) and roast pork.

Antares (Córdoba 3025) This microbrewery serves up seven of its own brews (including the punch-packing Barley Beer, weighing in at a hefty 10% alcohol content) and a range of German-influenced dishes and meat-and-beer stews. There's live music on Mondays and Thursdays.



Weekends, the place to be is Calle Alem, down near Playa Grande, which is a strip of bars, discos and restaurants. Stay away from here on Thursday nights if you have plans for Friday – that’s the night that the bars offer all the beer and Gancia (a vermouthlike alcoholic drink) you can drink for US\$3.

Entertainment

Cartelera Baires (Santa Fe 1844) Sells discount theater tickets in summer; another *boletería* (ticket office) in the casino building is open all year. Check the monthly *Guía de Actividades* (available from the tourist office) for happenings.

The discos on Av Constitución heat up late on the weekends. Check out Chocolate or Sobremonte, both of which charge US\$6 to US\$8 admission. Bus 551 runs from the center all night.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Aerolíneas Argentinas (☎ 496-0101; www.aerolineasargentinas.com; Moreno 2442) and **Austral** (☎ 496-0101; Moreno 2442) scoot to Buenos Aires (US\$65) often, as does **LAPA** (☎ 495-9694; San Martín 2648). **LADE** (☎ 493-8211), in the casino building, is cheapest to Buenos Aires (US\$45) and also serves Patagonia.

BUS

Mardel’s busy **bus terminal** (☎ 475-6076; Alberti 1602) has departures to Buenos Aires (US\$7 to US\$9, 5½ hours), Pinamar (US\$3, 2¼ hours), Villa Gesell (US\$9, two hours) and Necochea (US\$3, two hours), La Plata (US\$9, five hours), and Bahía Blanca (US\$7, seven hours).

TRAIN

The **train station** (☎ 475-6076; cnr Av Luro & Italia) is about 20 blocks from the beach, but there’s an **office** (☎ 451-2501) at the bus terminal. In summer there are trains seven times daily to Buenos Aires for US\$8 in *turista* and US\$16 in *primera* (those under 25 get a discount in the off-season). The trip takes about 5½ hours.

Getting Around

You can rent bikes at **Bicicletería Madrid** (Hipólito Yrigoyen 2249; per hour/day US\$2/6) on Plaza Mitre.

VILLA GESELL

☎ 02255 / pop 24,000

This laid-back dune community sleeps for most of the year, but in summer it’s a favorite

for young vacationing *porteños*, who stream in to party the warm nights away. It’s one of the prettiest coastal towns: small, with windy, sandy roads sporting charming summer cottages (and grander retreats).

Orientation & Information

The lively main street, Av 3 sees most of the action; a section of it becomes a pedestrian mall in summer.

There’s a central **tourist office** (www.gesell.gov.ar; Av 3 ☎ summer only), near Paseo 108; another **tourist office** (☎ 458596; Buenos Aires), about a 20-minute walk northwest of town, is open all year. Banks and their ATMs are on Av 3. The main **bus terminal** (cnr Av 3 & Paseo 140) is south of town; bus 504 or a US\$2 taxi ride will get you to the center. Short- and medium-distance buses stop at the mini terminal, which is at Blvd Gesell (known as ‘Boulevard’), and Paseo 100 (at Buenos Aires), about a 20-minute walk from the center.

Sights & Activities

Gesell’s long **beach** and boardwalk draw swimmers, sunbathers and horse riders. There’s year-round **fishing** from the pier, and surfers can rent boards from **Windy** (Paseo 104; per 2hr/day US\$10/20; ☎ 9am-6pm) on the beachfront. Bikes rent at **Casa Macca** (cnr Buenos Aires & Paseo 204; per hr/day US\$1/5; ☎ 9am-6pm). There’s a nightly summer **crafts fair** on the corner of Av 3 and Paseo 112.

Turismo Adventura (☎ 463-118; cnr Av 3 & Paseo 111) offers four-hour 4WD tours to the nearby lighthouse that are a combination of hair-raising dune-bashing and excellent photo opportunities.

MotoFox (☎ 454-646; cnr Buenos Aires & Alameda 212) rents 4WD motorbikes from US\$20 per hour for use on the dunes and beach around town. It’s cheaper (from US\$35) to take a two-hour excursion with them.

Feria Artesanal (Regional y Artística; Av 3 btwn Paseos 112 & 113) is an excellent arts and crafts fair that takes place every evening from mid-December through mid-March. The rest of the year it’s a weekend-only event.

Sleeping

The most affordable *hospedajes* are north of Av 3. It’s important to book ahead in summer, especially in the second half of January, when prices rise even more.

Los Medanos (☎ 463-205; Av 5, No 549; per person US\$8) One of the better budget options in town,

with decent-sized rooms and modern bathrooms. Try to get a room upstairs for better light and ventilation.

Residencial Viya (☎ 462-757; residencialviya@gesell.com.ar; Av 5, No 582, btwn Paseos 105 & 106; s/d US\$8/16) Rooms are smallish, but pleasant, and open onto a small patio at this friendly, owner-operated *residencial* on a quiet street.

Hotel Walkirias (☎ 468-862; Paseo 102 btwn Av 2 & Buenos Aires; s/d US\$20/40) Rampantly ugly from the outside, the Walkirias has a good cozy feel to it on the inside, with exposed beams and spacious modern bathrooms. There's a pool table and an excellent *quincho* (covered patio area) for all your BBQing requirements.

Gesell's campgrounds charge US\$3 to US\$36 per person. Most close off-season, but **Casablanca** (☎ 470-771), **Mar Dorado** (☎ 470-963) and **Monte Bubi** (☎ 470-732), clustered at the south end of town on Av 3, are open all year.

Eating & Drinking

Sutton 212 (cnr Av 2 & Paseo 105; mains US\$2-5) With its fabric-covered ceilings, Rajasthani lampshades and Zen rock garden, this is one of the hippest places along the coast. Surprisingly, the food, imported beers and cocktails are all reasonably priced.

El Estribo (cnr Av 3 & Paseo 109; mains US\$2-5) You won't get far in this town without somebody recommending that you eat at El Estribo. A *bife de chorizo* (thick sirloin) will set you back US\$4 and the *parrillada* for two (with enough meat for three) costs US\$8.

Rias Baixes (Paseo 105, no 335; meals US\$3-13) With its strip lighting and plastic chairs, this local *marisquería* (seafood restaurant) isn't about to win any interior-design prizes, but it definitely serves some of the freshest, best-value seafood in town.

The beachside restaurants are great places to have a few drinks and a snack at sunset, or a meal if your wallet is up to the challenge. The sidestreets off Av 3 between Paseo 103 and 107 are packed with small bars that fire up on weekends.

Entertainment

Anfiteatro del Pinar (☎ 467-123; cnr Av 10 & Paseo 102) Performances in January, February and Semana Santa. Gesell's Encuentros Corales take place annually in this lovely amphitheater.

Cine Teatro Atlas (☎ 462-969; Paseo 108 btwn Avs 3 & 4) Such rock-and-roll greats as Charly García and Los Pericos have played this small theater,

which doubles as a cinema during off-season months.

Pueblo Límite (☎ 452845; www.pueblolimito.com; Buenos Aires 2600; admission incl drink US\$7) A small-town megadisco, this complex, across from the Secretaría de Turismo, has three dance clubs, two bars and a restaurant in summer. Off season, it's just two discos, one for Latin pop, the other electronica.

Getting There & Away

Sample bus destinations include Buenos Aires (US\$12, six hours), Mar del Plata (US\$9, two hours) and Pinamar (US\$1, 40 minutes).

PINAMAR

☎ 02254 / pop 21,000

Rivaling Uruguay's Punta del Este in the fashion stakes, Pinamar is where wealthy Argentine families come to play in summertime.

Orientation & Information

Libertador, roughly paralleling the beach, and perpendicular Bunge are the main drags; streets on each side of Bunge form large fans. The **tourist office** (☎ 491-680; Bunge 654) has a good map. The **bus terminal** (cnr Shaw & Del Pejerrey) is 12 blocks from the beach and seven from the center. The train station is a couple of kilometers north of town, near Bunge.

Sights & Activities

Many places are only open on weekends and in summer, but at other times you can stroll peacefully in bordering pine forests and along the wide, attractive **beach** without being trampled by holidaymakers.

Sandboarding trips are available with **Sand Wave** (www.sandwave.com.ar). Bike hire is available from **Macca Bikes** (Bunge 1089; per hr/day US\$2/5; ☎ 9am-6pm). Surfboards hire for US\$3/hour from the pier in summertime.

Sleeping

Several campgrounds, charging US\$5 for two, line the coast between Ostende and Pinamar.

Albergue Bruno Valente (☎ 482-908; cnr Mitre & Nuestras Malvinas, Ostende; dm US\$7) The painstakingly slow renovations at this former hotel won't be done any time soon, so for now this remains a good, cheap option in summer and a cold and dreary one in winter. It's close to the beach, far from the center and some of the front rooms have balconies with sea views.

Hotel La Gaviota (☎ 482-079; Del Cangrejo 1332; s/d US\$13/20) Has my grandmother been moon-lighting as an interior designer? Spotless, smallish rooms that go a bit over the top on decoration (sorry, granny) and a comfortable patio area out back. About a 10-minute walk from the beach.

Hotel Cedro Azul (☎ 407-227; Jasón 497; www.cedroazulpinamar.com.ar; s/d US\$27/34) An excellent, central location and rooms with plenty of cedar finishings make this good value for money. The big buffet breakfast is a bonus, too.

Eating & Drinking

During summer, after midnight, the restaurants along the beachfront turn into bars and discos and generally go until the break of dawn. The rest of the year, and earlier, there are a couple of central bars worth checking out.

Jalisco (Bunge 478; mains US\$4-6) You'd think that throwing 'Argentine' into the Tex-Mex mix might bring some unholy results, but not so – and besides, where else are you going to get a shrimp burrito in this town?

Con Estilo Criollo (cnr Bunge & Marco Polo; mains US\$5-8) Don't be fooled by the 'international cuisine' sign out front: this is straight-down-the-line old-school *parrillada* stuff – but it's well done, and the US\$10 set meal is a bargain.

Cantina Tulumei (Bunge 64; mains US\$6-13) The seafood here isn't outrageously priced, and the atmosphere is better than most in town. Sunny days and warm nights, the tables out front are the place to be.

Antiek Bar (Libertador 27) With an old-time feel, and plenty of beer on tap, this is a good place to start the night. There's live music on weekends and a healthy cocktail list.

La Luna (Bunge 1429; ☎ 8pm-late Fri & Sat) Pinamar's hippest bar is heavy on the cocktails, crossover electronica, blacklighting and facial piercings.

Getting There & Away

Bus schedules resemble those from Villa Gesell. Trains run in summer to Buenos Aires. Purchase tickets at the bus terminal.

NECOCHEA

☎ 02262 / pop 89,000

Another family-oriented beach resort, Necochea is a lot more humble than Pinamar and is just barely saved from high-rise ugliness by the adjacent Parque Miguel Lillo, a huge

green space along the beach whose dense pine woods are good for cycling.

Orientation & Information

The **bus terminal** (☎ 422-470; cnr Av 58 & Ruta 86) is 4km from the beach. Bus 502 winds its way to the coast via the town center (itself 2km from the beach). The **tourist office** (☎ 430-158; Av 2 & Calle 79) is on the beach.

Activities

The Río Quequén, rich in trout and mackerel, allows for adventurous canoeing and rafting. Contact **Necochea Rafting** (☎ 1547-3541; necochea_rafting@hotmail.com) to get picked up from the tourist office.

Rent bikes at **Stop Bicicletas** (cnr Av 79 & Calle 10; per day US\$5; ☎ 9am-12:30pm & 3-6pm).

Azul Profundo (Av 79, No 293) offers diving and boat trips.

Sleeping

Camping Americano (☎ 435-832; cnr Av 2 & Calle 101; campsites per person US\$3) In Parque Miguel Lillo.

Hotel Neptuno (☎ 422-653; Calle 81, No 212; s/d US\$10/13) One step out of this excellent little budget hotel and you can see waves crashing. Rooms are small but have good bathrooms and cable TV.

Hotel Flamingo (☎ 420-049; hotflamingo@mixmail.com; Calle 83, No 333; s/d US\$10/15) Simple, decent-sized rooms. Ask to see a few; some are much bigger and come with bonuses like minifridges.

Hostería del Bosque (☎ 420002; jfrigerio@telpin.com.ar; Calle 89, No 350; s/d US\$23/27; ☎) Once home to a Russian princess, this is by far the most atmospheric place to stay in town. Rooms are quaint and comfortable, bathrooms modern and the beautiful Parque Lillo is right outside the front door.

Eating & Drinking

There are plenty of reasonably priced *parrillas* and *confiterías* along the beachfront and around the plaza.

Las Terrazas (beachside; mains US\$3-5) Most of the beachfront *balnearios* (private bathing resorts) serve food; this one also has an excellent deck area looking out over the waves.

Taberna Española (Calle 89, No 360; mains US\$4-8) For the Spanish take on the whole seafood thing, this is the place to come, and come hungry. The *picada de mariscos* (series of small seafood dishes; US\$7) is a gut buster – delicious fishy dishes just keep on coming.

La Frontera (beachside) The mix of rustic driftwood and marine ropes and ultramodern interiors with electronica and Latin pop music somehow works at this beachfront disco/bar. Weekends, the whole party spills out onto the beach and goes 'til the wee, wee hours. It's at the end of Av 75.

Getting There & Away

Bus destinations include Mar del Plata (US\$4, two hours), Bahía Blanca (US\$12, 5½ hours) and Buenos Aires (US\$18, seven hours).

BAHÍA BLANCA

☎ 0291 / pop 285,000

Mostly just a stopover point for people headed elsewhere, Bahía Blanca is surprisingly cosmopolitan for its size, and boasts Argentina's worst-signposted museum. For the lowdown on music, art and theater happenings around town, pick up a copy of the *Agenda Cultural*, available in the tourist office, restaurants and bars.

Information

Tourist office (☎ 459-4007; Alsina 45) Almost overwhelmingly helpful.

Post office (Moreno 34)

Pullman Cambio (San Martín 171) Changes traveler's checks.

Sights

The most worthwhile sight is **Museo del Puerto** (Guillermo Torres 4180, Puerto Ingeniero White; ☎ 8am-11am Mon-Fri), a 'community museum' that's a whimsical tribute to the immigrant population of Bahía Blanca. From downtown, buses 500 and 501 drop passengers a few blocks away – ask for plenty of directions. Looming above the trees behind the museum are the battlements of the castlelike thermoelectric plant, which is in the process of being turned into a railway museum and should be worth a look-in for the building it houses if nothing else. On weekends there's a **feria artesanal** (crafts fair) on Plaza Rivadavia.

Sleeping

Balneario Maldonado (☎ 452-9511; campsites per person US\$2) The campground is 4km southwest of downtown. Bus 514 gets you there.

Hotel Victoria (☎ 452-0522; Gral Paz 84; s/d US\$17/25) A range of pleasant rooms (including some cheaper ones with shared bathroom) in a nicely maintained older mansion with a courtyard.

Hotel Los Vascos (☎ 452-0977; Cerri 747; d US\$13, s/d with shared bathroom US\$7/10) Across from the train station, Los Vascos is without doubt the best of the budget bunch in the area. Rooms are pleasant and basic, and the wooden floors and spotless shared bathrooms add to the appeal, as does the friendly family who run the place.

Eating & Drinking

Piazza (cnr O'Higgins & Chiclana; mains US\$3-5) A popular lunch spot right on the plaza, with an imaginative menu and a fully stocked bar. Chocoholics should not miss the chocolate mousse (US\$1.50).

Your best bet for a few midweek drinks is the strip of bars on Alsina between Mitre and Alvarado. Weekends, the place to go is **Fuerte Argentina**, a cluster of bars, restaurants and discos at the north end of Salta. It's walkable, but a taxi from the center should cost about US\$1.50.

Getting There & Around

The airport is located 15km east of town. **Austral** (☎ 456-0561; San Martín 298) hops to Buenos Aires (US\$75). **LADE** (☎ 452-1063; Darregueira 21) flies cheaply but slowly to Patagonian destinations.

The bus terminal is about 2km east of Plaza Rivadavia; there are many local buses into town (fare is US\$30¢; buy magnetic cards from kiosks). Destinations include Sierra de la Ventana (US\$4, two hours), Buenos Aires (US\$22, 10 hours), Santa Rosa (US\$12, 4½ hours), Mar del Plata (US\$12, seven hours), Neuquén (US\$14, seven hours) and Río Gallegos (US\$50, 30 hours).

The **train station** (☎ 452-9196; Cerri 750) has nightly service to Buenos Aires. Fares are US\$5/15 in *turista/cama* class.

SIERRA DE LA VENTANA

☎ 0291 / pop 3100

Sierra de la Ventana is where *porteños* come to escape the summer heat, hike around a bit and cool off in nearby swimming holes. The nearby mountain range of the same name in Parque Provincial Ernesto Tornquist attracts hikers and climbers to its jagged peaks, which rise over 1300m.

Near the train station is the **tourist office** (☎ 491-5303; Roca 15).

For a nice walk, go to the end of Calle Tornquist and cross the small dam (which

makes a local **swimming hole**). On the other side you'll see **Cerro del Amor**; hike to the top for good views of town and pampas.

Sleeping & Eating

There are several free campsites along the river, with bathroom facilities nearby at the pleasant and grassy municipal swimming pool (US\$1).

Camping El Paraíso (☎ 491-5299; Diego Meyer; per person US\$2) For organized campgrounds.

Hospedaje La Perlita (☎ 491-5020; Morón; s/d US\$7/9) Clean and simple rooms face a peaceful, relaxing garden. The huge dog is overly friendly; the surly owner less so. It's near Islas Malvinas.

Hotel Atero (☎ 491-5002; cnr San Martín & Güemes; s/d US\$13/20) By far the most comfortable option in town, the Atero comes with all the conveniences, except for the swimming pool, but with the creek just down the road, this isn't such a drama.

Soly Luna (San Martín 393; mains US\$4-7) The standard menu in this cute little restaurant is spiced up by some local trout dishes and imaginative vegetarian options.

Sher (Güemes s/n; mains US\$5-7) Of the various *parrilla* joints around town, this one has the best atmosphere and service.

Getting There & Away

From in front of the *locutorio* on San Martín near Islas Malvinas, La Estrella has nightly buses to Buenos Aires (US\$19, eight hours), plus an 8am service to La Plata (US\$15, 12 hours). Expreso Cabildo goes to Bahía Blanca twice daily (US\$4, two hours).

The train station is near the tourist office. There's nightly train service from here or nearby Tornquist to Plaza Constitución in Buenos Aires for US\$5/6 in *turista/cama* class (11 hours).

AROUND SIERRA DE LA VENTANA

Popular for ranger-guided walks and independent hiking, 6700-hectare **Parque Provincial Ernesto Tornquist** (entry US\$1.50) is the starting point for the 1136m summit of **Cerro de la Ventana**. It's about two hours' routine hiking for anyone except the wheezing *porteño* tobacco addicts who struggle to the crest of what is probably the country's most climbed peak. Leave early: you can't climb after 11am in winter, noon in summer.

Friendly **Campamento Base** (☎ 0291-491-0067; RP 76, km 224; campsites per person US\$2) has shady

campsites, clean bathrooms and excellent hot showers.

Buses traveling between Bahía Blanca and Sierra de la Ventana can drop you at the entrance, and there are also buses directly to the park from the village (US\$1, one hour).

CENTRAL ARGENTINA

Containing the wine-producing centers of Mendoza, San Luis and San Juan (which themselves comprise an area known as Cuyo), there's no doubt what Central Argentina's main attraction is. Once you've polished off a few bottles, you won't be left twiddling your thumbs, though – this is also Argentina's adventure playground, and the opportunities for rafting, trekking, skiing and climbing are almost endless.

HISTORY

In the 16th century, Spaniards crossed from the Pacific over Uspallata Pass toward Mendoza to manage *encomiendas* among the indigenous Huarpe. Though politically and economically tied to the northern viceregal capital in Lima, Cuyo's isolation fostered a strong independence and political initiative which later provided the basis for present-day Cuyo's defined regional identity.

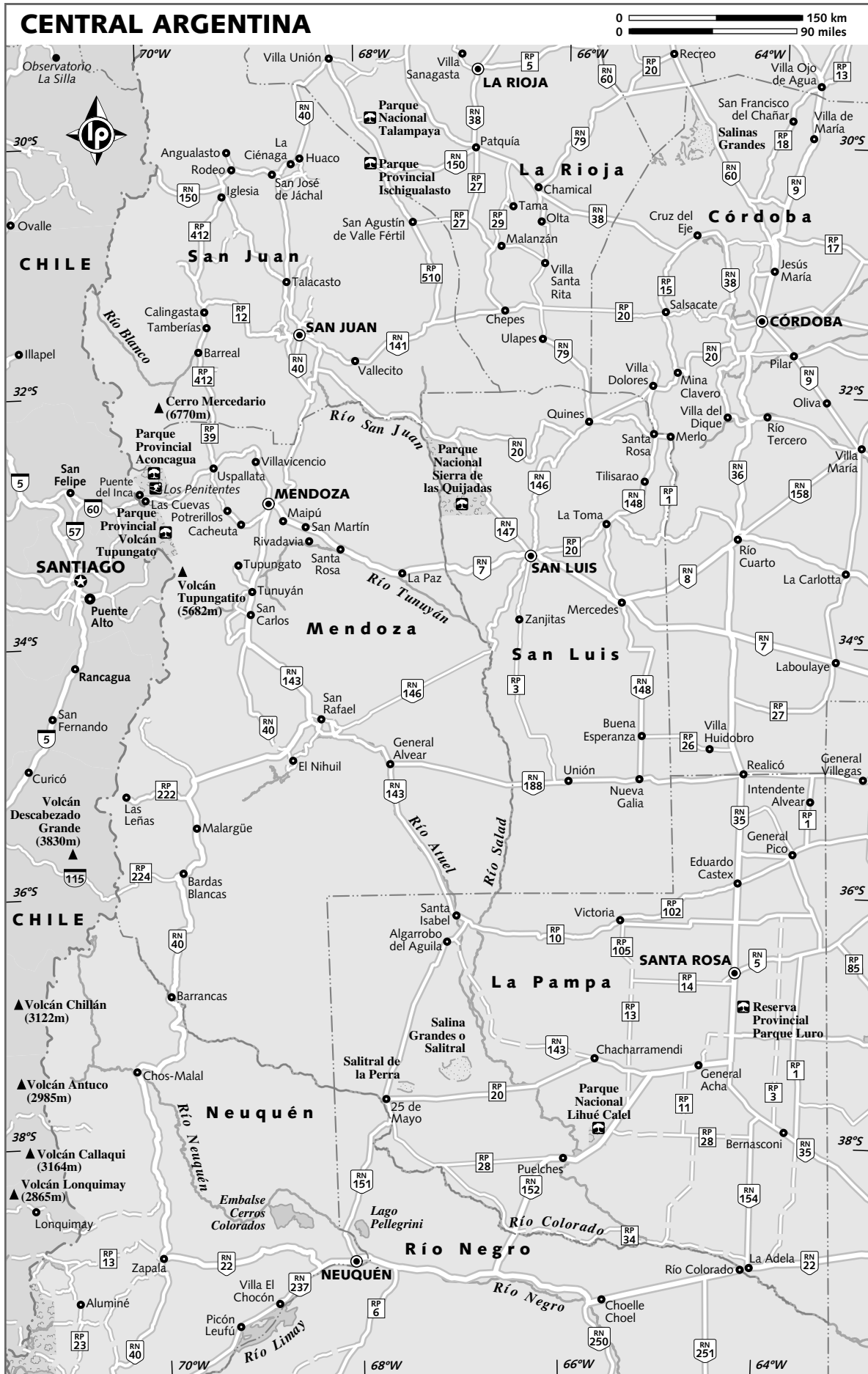
Irrigated vineyards became important during later colonial periods, but Cuyo's continued isolation limited the region's prosperity. It wasn't until the arrival of the railway in 1884 that prosperity arrived; improved irrigation systems also allowed for expansion of grape and olive cultivation, plus alfalfa for livestock. Vineyard cultivation grew from 6400 hectares in 1890 to 240,000 in the 1970s, and many vineyards remain relatively small, owner-operated enterprises to this day.

SAN LUIS

☎ 02652 / pop 153,000

San Luis is coming up as a backpacking destination, but still has a long way to go. Most people come here to visit the nearby Parque Nacional Sierra de las Quijadas. The commercial center is along the parallel streets of San Martín and Rivadavia, between Plaza Pringles in the north and Plaza Independencia to the south.

The **tourist office** (☎ 423-957; www.turismoensanluis.gov.ar; intersection of Junín, San Martín & Arturo Illia) has an



almost overwhelming amount of information on San Luis' surrounding areas. Several banks, mostly around Plaza Pringles, have ATMs.

The large, multibed dorms at **San Luis Hostel** (☎ 424-188; Falucho 646; www.sanluishostel.com.ar; dm US\$6) are a bit of a turnoff, but the rest of this new hostel is beautiful. Staff can arrange trips to Sierra de las Quijadas (around US\$20 per person including transport and guide) and tours of local gold mines.

Av Illia, which runs northwest from the delightful Plaza Pringles, is the center of San Luis' moderately hopping bar scene. There are plenty of fast-food options along here. **Las Pircas** (Pringles 1417; mains US\$3-7) is a more serious restaurant/*parrilla*. The menu is wide and touches like balsamic vinegar for your salad really make the place.

Austral (☎ 452-671; Illia 472) flies daily to Buenos Aires.

The **bus terminal** (España btwn San Martín & Rivadavia) has departures to Mendoza (US\$10, 3½ hours), San Juan (US\$8, four hours), Rosario (US\$13, 10 hours) and Buenos Aires (US\$30, 12 hours).

PARQUE NACIONAL SIERRA DE LAS QUIJADAS

This rarely visited 150,000 hectare **national park** (admission US\$2) protects red sandstone canyons and dry lake beds among the Sierra de las Quijadas, the peaks of which reach 1200m at Cerro Portillo. Dinosaur tracks and fossils dating from about 120 million years ago have been found here.

Hiking possibilities are excellent, but the complex canyons require a tremendous sense of direction or, preferably, a local guide. Hikers should beware of summer rains and flash floods, which make the canyons extremely dangerous.

There's a shady **campground** (free) and a small store with groceries and drinks.

Buses from San Luis to San Juan will drop you at the park entrance and ranger station (US\$3, 1½ hours), from where it's a 6km walk to Portrero de la Aguada, where you can hire guides (about US\$5). Drop into the **park office** (San Martín 874, local 2, 1st fl) in San Luis before you go, to see if you can't snag a ride with a ranger, or get someone to pick you up from the highway. To hire a guide, try to arrive before about 2:30pm, when they pack up and leave. Buses from San Juan to San Luis pass every hour or so, but don't always stop.

MENDOZA

☎ 0261 / pop 111,000

In 1861 an earthquake leveled the city of Mendoza. Bummer for the *mendocinos* (people from Mendoza), but a bonus for us. The authorities anticipated (somewhat pessimistically) the *next* earthquake by rebuilding the city with wide avenues (for the rubble to fall into) and spacious plazas (to use as evacuation points). The result is one of Argentina's most seductive cities – a joy to walk around and stunningly picturesque.

Add to this the fact that it's smack in the middle of many of the country's best vineyards (the region produces 70% of the country's wine) and the base for any number of outdoor activities, and you know you'll be spending more than a couple of days here.

Early March's **Fiesta Nacional de la Vendimia** (wine harvest festival) attracts big crowds; book accommodation well ahead. The surrounding countryside offers wine tasting, mountaineering, cycling and white-water rafting. Many different tours of the area are available.

Orientation

The bus terminal is about 15 minutes' walk from the center; catch the Villa Nueva trolley if you don't feel like walking. Mendoza's **airport** (☎ 448-7128) is 6km north of the city. Bus 60 (Aeropuerto) goes from Calle Salta straight there.

Information

Wine snobs and the wine-curious should pick up a free copy of the **Grapevine** (www.thegrapevine-argentina.com), an English-language magazine devoted to Mendoza's wine scene.

Cambio Santiago (Av San Martín 1199) Charges 2% for traveler's checks.

Information office (☎ 431-5000) In the bus terminal. Another kiosk is at the corner of Avs Las Heras and Mitre.

Tourist kiosk (☎ 420-1333; Garibaldi) This helpful kiosk near Av San Martín is the most convenient information source.

Tourist office (☎ 420-2800; Av San Martín 1143)

Near the tourist kiosk.

Sights

The spacious **Museo Fundacional** (cnr Alberdi & Videla Castillo; admission US\$1.50; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat, 3-10pm Sun) protects the foundations of the original *cabildo*, destroyed by the 1861 earthquake. There are also exhibits of items found at the

site and scale models of old and new Mendoza. Check out the 1893 painting depicting the social hierarchy – with the Spanish at the top, and the ‘Mulattos and Indios’ at the bottom – it’d be nice to think of it as a relic from the past.

The Virgen de Cuyo in the **Iglesia, Convento y Basílica de San Francisco** (Necochea 201) was the patron of San Martín’s Army of the Andes. Unique **Museo Popular Callejero**, along the sidewalk at the corner of Av Las Heras and 25 de Mayo, consists of encased dioramas depicting the history of one of Mendoza’s major avenues.

Parque General San Martín is a forested 420-hectare green space containing **Cerro de la Gloria** (nice views), several museums and a lake, among other things. Bus 110 gets you here from Plaza Independencia.

Plaza Independencia has a **crafts fair** Thursday through Sunday night, while Plaza Pellegrini holds its own weekend **antique market** with music and dancing. Also check out the beautiful tile work in Plaza España.

WINERIES

Argentina’s wines are constantly improving, and consequently attracting international attention. Wine tasting is a popular activity at the many wineries in the area. Bus 170 leaves from Rioja between Garibaldi and Catamarca to get to both of the following. Call first to confirm opening hours.

About 17km southeast of downtown in Maipú is **Bodega Viña El Cerno** (☎ 481-1567; Moreno 631, Coquimbito, Maipú; 🗺️ tours 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, or with reservations Sat & Sun), built in 1864, a romantically small winery surrounded by vineyards.

Also in Maipú is **La Rural** (Museo del Vino; ☎ 497-2013; Montecaseros 2625, Coquimbito, Maipú; 🗺️ 9:30am-5:30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat & Sun). Its museum displays wine-making tools used by 19th-century pioneers, as well as colonial religious sculptures from the Cuyo region. Tours run every half hour on weekdays, hourly on weekends.

Cyclists can consider biking a 40km circuit that would cover these wineries and more. Tourist information in Mendoza has an area map.

Activities

Scaling nearby Aconcagua (see p127) is one of the most popular activities here, but there are also plenty of operators offering rafting,

climbing, mountain biking, trekking etc. All the hostels listed in the Sleeping section can organize these.

Inka Expediciones (☎ 425-0871; www.inka.com.ar; Juan B Justo 345) offers fully serviced guided treks to the summit of Aconcagua as well as logistical support for independent climbers.

Altos Andes (☎ 429-7024; www.altosandes.com.ar; Rivadavia 122, office 13) does half-hour light-plane scenic flights over Mendoza for US\$60; longer flights around the Aconcagua summit are US\$190.

Bethancourt Rafting (☎ 429-9965; www.bethancourt.com.ar; Lavalle 35, Local 8) offers rafting from US\$12, mountain biking (US\$20), rappelling and mountain climbing (US\$20).

Snow Sky (Av Las Heras 555) has ski equipment and mountain-bike rental: skis, poles and boots US\$17 per day, snowboards US\$20.

Courses

IAIM Instituto Intercultural (☎ 429-0269; www.spanishcourses.com.ar; cnr San Juan & Rondeau) offers group/individual Spanish classes for US\$120/300 for a 20-hour week and homestays with local families for US\$150 per week.

Sleeping

Note that hotel prices rise from January to March, most notably during the wine festival in early March.

Parque Suizo (☎ 444-1991; campsites for 2 US\$4) About 6km northwest of town, in El Challoa, this woody campground has hot showers, laundry facilities and a grocery. Get here on Bus 110, which leaves from LN Alem just east of Av San Martín and from Av Sarmiento.

Hostel Independencia (☎ 423-1806; www.hostel independencia.com.ar; Av Mitre 1237; dm/d US\$8/19; 📺) This excellent 60-bed hostel occupies a historic mansion with an ornate interior of wainscoting, hardwood floors, and an excellent common area. There’s a huge back patio and spacious rooms with four to 10 beds in each. The showers are a bit of a hike from the dorms.

Itaka House (☎ 423-9793; Villanueva 480; dm/d US\$8/27; 📺 🗺️) Set in a beautiful big house in the middle of the bar strip, the Itaka has decent four- to six-bed dorms, a good outdoor bar downstairs and a lovely terrace overlooking the street. It’s west of the center.

Break Point (☎ 423-9514; www.breakpointhostel.com.ar; Villanueva 241; dm US\$9; 📺 🗺️) Hostels in Argentina have come a long way, and this place west of the center is an excellent example. It

MENDOZA



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- Bus Terminal.....20 E6
- LanChile.....21 C5
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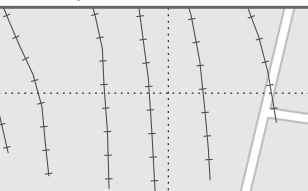
To Inka Expediciones (300m)

To Chilean Consulate (1km)

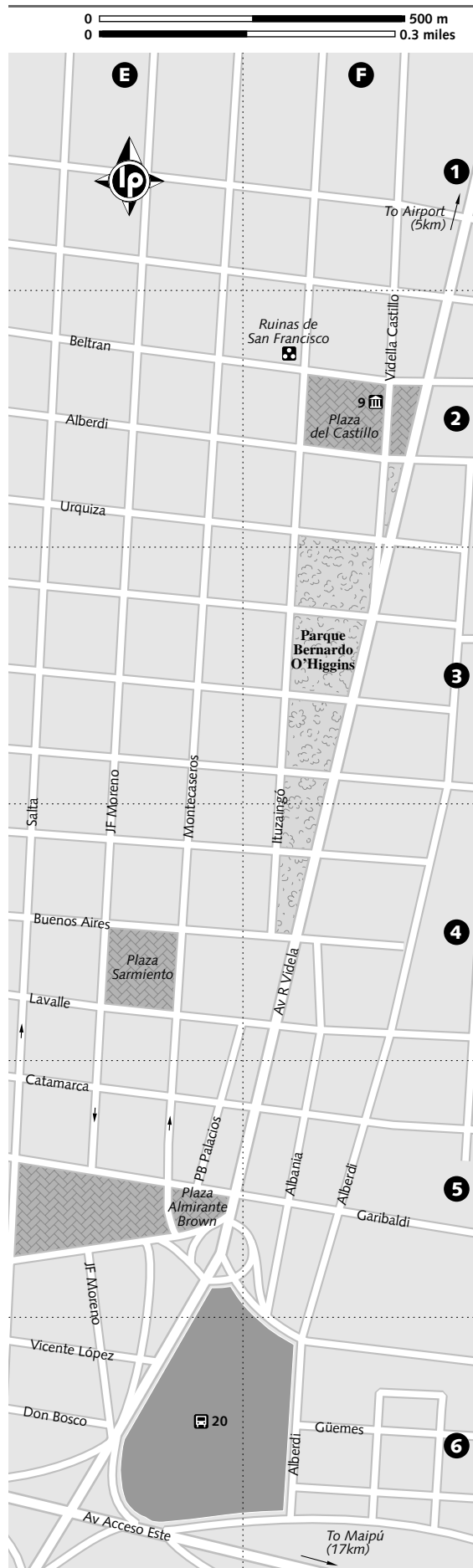
To Parque General San Martín (2km)

To Philip Morris (200m); Por Acá (300m);
Cocina Poblana (600m);
3-90 (750m); Taco Tabasco (800m);
Break Point (800m); Itaka House (1km)

To Parque Suizo Camping (6.5km)



To Tablao (300m)



has spacious, comfortable sitting areas, an excellent garden and pool area and a well-appointed kitchen. First class.

Hotel Laser (☎ 438-0218; Gral Paz 360; s/d US\$8/12) Budget hotels aren't exactly jumping out at you in Mendoza, but this is a pretty good one: central and no-frills, but comfortable enough; this section of Gral Paz and Av Godoy Cruz has many similarly priced small hotels and *hospedajes*.

Hotel Rincón Vasco (☎ 423-3033; Av Las Heras 590; s/d US\$15/23; ♿) In a good location on the busy, restaurant-strewn Av Las Heras, this slightly worn hotel is good value, especially if you get a balcony (and don't mind street noise).

Hotel del Sol (☎ 438-0218; hoteles@ciudad.com.ar; Av Las Heras 212; s/d US\$20/28; ♿) On busy Av Las Heras in a well-preserved old building, offering fair-sized rooms with ample bathrooms and small, stark lounge areas on each floor.

Eating

Sidewalk restaurants on pedestrian Av Sarmiento are fine places to people-watch. The restaurants along Avs Las Heras and San Martín offer good-value set meals; see signboards for details.

Mercado Central (cnr Av Las Heras & Patricias Mendocinas) The best budget choice; its various stalls offer pizza, empanadas and sandwiches.

Cocina Poblana (Villanueva 217; mains US\$3-4) The very tasty, inexpensive Middle Eastern food comes as a welcome break from all that steak. This is the current hot favorite in this part of town – come early or drop in to reserve a table, otherwise you may be in for a wait.

Tablao (San Juan 165; mains US\$3.50) If you're a *lomito* (steak sandwich) fan, don't miss this place. If you're not, get with the program. For a place whose seats are sponsored by the local beer company, Tablao manages to scrape together a bit of style, but the real reason to come here is the *lomitos* – delicious, fresh and served on homemade bread.

3-90 (Villanueva 463; mains around US\$4) Now *this* is a pasta restaurant: 20 types of sauce, 30 types of pasta, all for under US\$4, served on sidewalk tables with a decent wine list.

La Tasca de Plaza España (Montevideo 117; meals US\$4-6) With excellent Mediterranean and Spanish tapas (mostly seafood), great wines, intimate atmosphere, good art and friendly service, La Tasca is one of Mendoza's best.

Taco Tabasco (Villanueva 334; meals US\$4-6) We've all suffered Mexican Restaurant Letdown in

the past, but this place does alright – it's definitely more Tex than Mex, but the portions are big and the food is tasty.

Drinking

Av Villanueva, west of the center, is ground zero in terms of Mendoza's happening bar scene. Going for a wander is your best bet, but here are a few to get you started.

Philip Morris (Villanueva s/n) A classic Argentine bar story – the owners couldn't come up with a name, so people started calling it by the cigarette billboard above the door. The name stuck, as did the laid-back ambience and varied music selection.

Por Acá (Villanueva 557) Purple and yellow outside and polka-dotted upstairs, this bar-cum-lounge gets packed after 2am, and by the end of the night, dancing on the tables is not uncommon. Good retro dance music.

La Reserva (Rivadavia 34; admission free-US\$3) This small, nominally gay bar packs in a mixed crowd and has outrageous drag shows at midnight every night, with hard-core techno later.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Aerolíneas Argentinas & Austral (☎ 420-4185; www.aerolineasargentinas.com; Av Sarmiento 82) has daily flights to Buenos Aires for US\$97 to US\$107.

LanChile (☎ 425-7900; Rivadavia 135) flies twice daily to Santiago de Chile (US\$100 to US\$190).

BUS

The **bus terminal** (☎ 431-1299) is about 10 blocks east of the town center.

Destination	Duration (hrs)	Cost (US\$)
Aconcagua	3½	6
Buenos Aires	14	38
Córdoba	10	17
Las Leñas	7	10
Los Penitentes	4	5
Malargüe	6	10
Neuquén	12	24
San Juan	2	5
San Luis	3¼	9
San Rafael	3¼	5
Tucumán	14	26
Uspallata	2	5
Valparaíso	8	17

Getting Around

Mendoza buses take magnetic fare cards, sold at kiosks in multiple values of the US60¢ fare. Trolleys cost US60¢ in coins.

For bike rentals, try **Snow Sky** (Av Las Heras 555; per day US\$5).

USPALLATA

☎ 02624 / pop 3500

In an exceptionally beautiful valley surrounded by polychrome mountains, 105km west of Mendoza at an altitude of 1751m, this crossroads village along RN 7 is a good base for exploring the surrounding area, which served as a location for the Brad Pitt epic *Seven Years in Tibet*.

Sights

One kilometer north of the highway junction toward Villavicencio, a signed side road leads to ruins and a museum at the **Bóvedas Históricas Uspallata**, a metallurgical site since pre-Columbian times. About 4km north of Uspallata, in a volcanic outcrop near a small monument to San Ceferino Namuncurá, is a faded but still visible set of **petroglyphs**. Tourist information is available opposite the bus terminal.

Sleeping & Eating

Camping Municipal (campsites US\$2; P 🚰) Uspallata's poplar-shaded campground is 500m north of the Villavicencio junction.

Hostel Uspallata (in Mendoza ☎ 429-3220; www.hosteluspallata.com.ar; RN 7 s/n; dm/d US\$8/28) A plain but comfortable lodge in a beautiful setting 5km out of town. Horse-riding, trekking and trout fishing are available from the hostel. It also arranges rafting and climbing trips. From Mendoza, tell the bus driver you're getting off here. Otherwise it's a US\$2 *remise* ride from town.

Hostería Los Cóndores (☎ 420-002; Las Heras s/n; s/d US\$23/32; 🍷 🚰) Close to the junction, this hotel has spacious, carpeted rooms with huge bathrooms and an on-site restaurant. A sign warns that no mate drinking is allowed in the swimming pool.

Café Tibet (RN7 & Las Heras; mains US\$2-5) Tibetan artifacts (leftover props from the movie) clash slightly with the gangsta rap on the sound system. Food on offer is your standard café fare.

Getting There & Away

Expreso Uspallata runs a few buses daily between Mendoza (US\$5, two hours) and

Uspallata. Santiago-bound buses will carry passengers to and across the border but are often full; in winter, the pass can close to all traffic for weeks at a time.

AROUND USPALLATA

Los Penitentes

Both the terrain and snow cover can be excellent for downhill and Nordic skiing at Los Penitentes (☎ 02624-420-229; www.lospenitentes.com), two hours southwest of Uspallata at an altitude of 2580m. Lifts and accommodations are very modern; the maximum vertical drop on its 21 runs exceeds 700m. A day ski pass costs around US\$32. The season runs June to September.

The cozy converted cabin of **Hostel Los Penitentes** (in Mendoza ☎ 0261-429-0707; www.penitentes.com.ar; dm US\$6) accommodates 20 in extremely close quarters, and has a kitchen, wood-burning stove and three shared bathrooms. Meals are available for US\$3. The hostel offers Nordic- and downhill-skiing trips and snowshoeing expeditions in winter and Aconcagua treks and expeditions in summer.

From Mendoza, several buses pass daily through Uspallata to Los Penitentes (US\$5, four hours).

Puente del Inca

About 8km west of Los Penitentes, on the way to the Chilean border and near the turnoff to Aconcagua, is one of Argentina's most striking wonders. Situated 2720m above sea level, Puente del Inca is a natural stone bridge spanning the Río Mendoza. Underneath it, rock walls and the ruins of an old spa are stained yellow by warm, sulfurous thermal springs. You can hike into Parque Provincial Aconcagua from here.

The little, no-frills hostel of **La Vieja Estación** (in Mendoza ☎ 0261-452-110; www.viejaestacion.com; campsites per person US\$2, dm US\$7) offers mountain climbing, glacier trekking, snowshoeing and has plans to introduce dogsledding. A cheap restaurant and bar are also on the premises.

Cozy, wood-paneled rooms and a big dining hall give **Hostería Puente del Inca** (☎ 02624-420-222; s/d US\$33/37) a real ski-lodge feel.

Daily buses from Mendoza take about four hours (US\$6).

PARQUE PROVINCIAL ACONCAGUA

On the Chilean border, Parque Provincial Aconcagua protects 71,000 hectares of high country surrounding the western hemi-

sphere's highest summit, 6960m Cerro Aconcagua. There are trekking possibilities to base camps and refuges beneath the permanent snow line.

Reaching Aconcagua's summit requires at least 13 to 15 days, including some time for acclimatization. Potential climbers should get RJ Secor's climbing guide, *Aconcagua*, and check www.aconcagua.com.ar for more information.

Mid-November to mid-March, permits are mandatory for trekking and climbing; these permits vary from US\$20 to US\$40 for trekkers and US\$100 to US\$300 for climbers, depending on the date. Mid-December to late January is high season. Purchase permits in Mendoza in the main **tourist office** (☎ 0261-420-2800; www.aconcagua.mendoza.com.ar; Av San Martín 1143).

Many adventure-travel agencies in and around Mendoza arrange excursions into the high mountains. See the Mendoza Activities section (p123) for details.

SAN JUAN

☎ 0264 / pop 113,000

Smelling kerosene? Don't panic – that's just the proud folks of San Juan *polishing their sidewalks*. Uh-huh. An attractive enough place, San Juan's big claim to fame are the nearby wineries and access to Parque Provincial Ischigualasto, though the adventure tourism scene is definitely growing here.

The **tourist office** (☎ 422-2431; www.turismo.sanjuan.gov.ar; Sarmiento 24 Sur) also has a smaller office at the bus terminal. Cambio Santiago is at Gral Acha 52 Sur, and there are several ATMs. The post office is on Roza near Tucumán.

Sights

The **Museo de Ciencias Naturales** (admission free; ☎ 9am-1pm), now in the old train station at the corner of España and Maipú, has exhibits of Triassic dinosaur skeletons found in the area, and you can see the preparation labs.

Museo de Vino Santiago Graffigna (Colón 1342 Norte; admission free; ☎ 9am-1pm Tue-Fri, 10am-8pm Sun, wine bar 9am-2am Fri & Sat) is a new wine museum well worth a visit. It also has a wine bar where you can taste many of San Juan's best wines.

Sleeping & Eating

Camping El Pinar (campsites per person US\$60¢, per tent US\$1) Buses go to this woodsy municipal site on Benavídez Oeste, located about 6km west of downtown.

Zonda Hostel (☎ 420-1009; www.zondahostel.com.ar; Laprida 572 Oeste; dm US\$6; P) A new hostel in a lovingly converted house with a big backyard, Ping-Pong table, 16 beds and friendly young owners. Trekking, horse-riding, winery tours and rafting trips are on offer.

Triasico Hostel (☎ 421-9528; www.triasicohostel.com.ar; P Echagüe 520 E; dm US\$6; ♿ ♿) A sweet little hostel about 15 minutes' walk from the terminal, the Triasico has slightly cramped rooms, good common areas and a well-stocked kitchen. They offer Spanish classes, waterskiing, windsailing, rafting and trekking in the Valle de la Luna.

Hotel Nuevo San Francisco (☎ 427-2821; www.nuevo-sanfrancisco.com.ar; España 284 Sur; s/d US\$15/20; P ♿) One of the best in town, this welcoming, immaculate hotel has good-sized rooms with massive bathrooms.

Soychú (Roza 223 Oeste; tenedor libre US\$2.50) Most vegetarian buffets just whack out a few salads and let you fend for yourself, but this little place goes all out. Arrive early for the best selection. Fresh juices too.

Club Sirio Libanés (Entre Ríos 33 Sur; mains US\$3-5) This classy old-school establishment serves dishes with a Middle Eastern flare. The *pollo deshuesado en salsa de ajillo* (boned chicken in garlic sauce) is especially good.

Getting There & Away

Aerolíneas Argentinas/Austral (☎ 421-4158; San Martín 215 Oeste) fly daily to Buenos Aires for US\$100.

The **bus terminal** (☎ 422-1604; Estados Unidos 492 Sur) has buses to Mendoza (US\$4, two hours), Córdoba (US\$13, eight hours), San Agustín de Valle Fértil (US\$5, four hours), La Rioja (US\$11, six hours), Tucumán (US\$22, 11 hours) and Buenos Aires (US\$26, 15 hours).

AROUND SAN JUAN Vallecito

According to legend, Deolinda Correa trailed her conscript husband on foot through the desert during the civil wars of the 1840s before dying of thirst, hunger and exhaustion, but passing muleteers found her infant son alive at her breast. Vallecito, 60km southeast of San Juan, is believed to be the site of her death.

Since the 1940s, the once simple and now offbeat **Difunta Correa Shrine** has become a small town. Truck drivers are especially devoted believers: all around the country, roadside shrines display her image surrounded by can-

dles, small banknotes, and bottles of water left to quench her thirst.

Vallecito has an inexpensive *hostería* and a decent restaurant, but it's a better day trip than an overnigher. Empresa Vallecito buses arrive regularly from San Juan (US\$3, 1½ hours), but any other eastbound bus will drop you at the site.

San Agustín de Valle Fértil

This relaxed, green little village is 250km northeast of San Juan and set amid colorful hills and rivers. It relies on farming, animal husbandry, mining and tourism. Visitors to Parques Ischigualasto and Talampaya use San Agustín as a base, and there are nearby **petroglyphs** and the Río Seco to explore.

The tourist office, on the plaza, can help set you up with tours of the area. There's camping and several cheap accommodations, and a couple of good *parrillas*. Change money before you get here.

Buses roll daily to and from San Juan (US\$5, four hours).

Parque Provincial Ischigualasto

At every meander in the canyon of Parque Provincial Ischigualasto, a desert valley between sedimentary mountain ranges, the intermittent waters of the Río Ischigualasto have exposed a wealth of Triassic fossils and dinosaur bones – up to 180 million years old – and carved distinctive shapes in the monochrome clays, red sandstone and volcanic ash. The desert flora of *algarrobo* trees, shrubs and cacti complement the eerie moonscape, and common fauna include guanacos, condors, Patagonian hares and foxes.

Camping is (unofficially) permitted at the visitors center near the entrance, which also has a *confitería* with simple meals and cold drinks. There are toilets and showers, but water shortages are frequent and there's no shade.

Ischigualasto is about 80km north of San Agustín. Given its size and isolation, the only practical way to visit the park is by vehicle. After you pay the US\$5 entrance fee, a ranger will accompany your vehicle on a two- or three-hour circuit over the park's unpaved roads, which may be impassable after rain.

If you have no transport, ask the tourist office in San Agustín about tours or hiring a car and driver, or contact the **park** (☎ 0264-491-100). **Ischigualasto Tour** (☎ 0264-427-5060; Entre Ríos 203 Sur,

San Juan), has tours for about US\$25 per person (English-speaking guides may cost more). Some tours can be combined with **Parque Nacional Talampaya**, almost 100km northeast of Ischigualasto.

Empresa Vallecito buses from San Juan to San Agustín and La Rioja stop at the Los Baldecitos checkpoint, about 5km from the park's entrance.

MALARGÜE

☎ 02627 / pop 23,000

From precolonial times, the Pehuenche people hunted and gathered in the valley of Malargüe, but the advance of European agricultural colonists dispossessed the original inhabitants. Today petroleum is a principal industry, but Malargüe, 400km south of Mendoza, is also a year-round outdoor activity center: Las Leñas (right) offers Argentina's best **skiing**, and there are archeological sites and fauna reserves nearby, as well as organized **caving** possibilities. Hotel prices go up in ski season. The hotels listed here offer guests a 50% discount on ski tickets at Las Leñas. Ask at the desk before checking in.

The **tourist office** (☎ 471-659; www.malargue.gov.ar; RN40, Parque del Ayer) is at the north end of town, directly on the highway. They sometimes give out free pens.

Open all year, **Camping Municipal Malargüe** (☎ 470691; Alfonso Capdevila; campsites US\$2) is at the north end of town.

Located five blocks east of the clock tower, **Corre Caminos** (☎ 471-534; Telles Meneses 897; dm/d US\$7/20; 🛏) has six- to 12-bed dorms, one double, discount ski hire and a cozy atmosphere.

Hostel Nord Patagonia (☎ 472-276; Fray Inalican 52 este; dm/d US\$7/14; 🛏) is a friendly hostel in a small converted house with fireplace. Summer activities include volcano treks, rafting and horse-riding. In winter it offers transfers to Las Leñas for US\$7 per person.

Hotel Turismo (☎ 471-042; San Martín 224; s/d US\$20/27) has plain but comfortable rooms (the upstairs ones are best) with TV and phone. The downstairs restaurant has a real ski-lodge feel.

In the land of thick and juicy steaks, **La Posta** (Roca 374; mains US\$3-5) serves up some seriously thick and juicy steaks. There's also a good pasta selection and a fine wine list.

The **bus terminal** (cnr Roca & Aldao) has regular services to Mendoza (US\$10, six hours) and Las Leñas (US\$5, 1½ hrs). There is a weekly

summer service across the 2500m Paso Pehuenche and down the awesome canyon of the Río Maule to Talca, Chile.

LAS LEÑAS

Wealthy Argentines and foreigners alike come to Las Leñas, the country's most prestigious ski resort, to look dazzling zooming down the slopes and then spend nights partying until the sun peeks over the snowy mountains. Summer activities include hiking, horse-riding and mountain biking. Despite the fancy glitter, it's not completely out of reach for budget travelers.

Open approximately July to October, Las Leñas is only 70km from Malargüe. Its 33 runs reach a peak of 3430m, with a maximum drop of 1230m. Lift tickets run about US\$30 to US\$41 (depending on the season) for a full day of skiing. The **ticket office** (☎ 02627-471-100; www.laslenas.com; 🗓 mid-Jun-late Sep) can provide more information.

Budget travelers will find regular transport from Malargüe, where accommodations are cheaper. Buses from Mendoza (US\$10) take seven hours.

SANTA ROSA

☎ 02954 / pop 95,000

One of the only towns of any size out on the Pampas, Santa Rosa doesn't have a whole lot to offer the average traveler, except for being a staging point for nearby Parque Nacional Lihué Calel, an isolated but pretty park that's home to a surprising assortment of vegetation and wildlife.

Information

You'll find several ATMs near Plaza San Martín.

Tourist information center (🗓 24hr) At the bus terminal.

Tourist office (☎ 424-404; www.turismolapampa.gov.ar; cnr Luro & San Martín) Near the bus terminal.

Post office (Hilario Lagos 258)

Sights

The **Museo de Bellas Artes** (cnr 9 de Julio & Villegas; admission free; 🗓 7am-1:30pm & 2-8pm Tue-Fri, 6:30-9:30pm Sat & Sun) is an unexpectedly modern gallery containing work by local and national artists. There are five rooms of rotating exhibitions with a strong emphasis on contemporary/abstract art, and a little sculpture garden out the back.

Laguna Don Tomás is the place where locals boat, swim, play sports or just stroll.

Sleeping & Eating

Centro Recreativo Municipal Don Tomás (☎ 455-358; campsites per person US\$1) Provides decent campsites at the west end of Av Uruguay. From the bus terminal, take the El Indio bus.

Hostería Santa Rosa (☎ 423-868; Hipólito Yrigoyen 696; s/d US\$7/10) This great little cheapie near the bus terminal offers fine rooms and a homey atmosphere.

Hotel Calfucurá (☎ 433-303; calfuar@cpenet.com.ar; San Martín 695; s/d US\$38/44; 📶 🚰 🚿) The Calfu-curá's sedate atmosphere and handy location around the corner from the bus terminal make it a winner. This is the best hotel in town by far, and rooms are comfy, if nothing special.

Club Español (Hilario Lagos 237; meals US\$3-8) There's good Argentine and Spanish food here, as well as outstanding service, and the Spanish tiled courtyard (replete with tinkling fountain) is as good a place as any to while away a few hours.

Getting There & Away

Austral (☎ 433-076; cnr Lagos & Moreno) flies to Buenos Aires. Taxis to the airport, which is 3km from town, cost about US\$2.

The **bus terminal** (☎ 422-952; Luro 365) has services to Bahía Blanca (US\$9, five hours), Puerto Madryn (US\$22, 10 hours), Buenos Aires (US\$15, nine hours), Mendoza (US\$18, 12 hours), Neuquén (US\$16, 15 hours) and Bariloche (US\$19, 21 hours).

PARQUE NACIONAL LIHUÉ CALEL

This park's small, remote mountain ranges, 226km southwest of Santa Rosa, were a stronghold of Araucanian resistance during General Roca's Conquista del Desierto (Conquest of the Desert). Its salmon-colored granites, reaching 600m, offer a variety of subtle environments that change with the season and even with the day.

Sudden storms can bring flash floods to this 10,000-hectare desert and create spectacular, temporary waterfalls. Even when there's no rain, subterranean streams nourish the *monte*, a scrub forest of surprising botanical variety.

The most common mammals are gray foxes, guanacos, *maras* (Patagonian hares) and *vizcachas* (cute relatives of the chinchilla). Birds include *ñandú* (rhea) and the carancho (crested caracara).

From the park campground, a signed trail leads through a dense *caldén* thorn forest to a site with **petroglyphs**, unfortunately vandalized. From here, another trail reaches the 589m summit of **Cerro de la Sociedad Científica Argentina**, with outstanding views of the sierra, surrounding marshes and *salares* (salt lakes). Look for flowering cacti between the boulders.

Sleeping & Eating

The free campground near the visitor center has shade, picnic tables, firepits, cold showers and many birds. Bring food; the nearest supplies are at the town of Puelches, 35km south.

ACA Hostería (02952-436-101; s/d US\$7/10) If you don't want to camp, you have one choice: this basic but functional place on the highway. There is a restaurant (which is nothing to get excited about) and the park entrance is a short walk away.

Getting There & Away

Buses leave from Santa Rosa for the park daily (US\$5, four hours).

THE LAKE DISTRICT

Extending from Neuquén down through Esquel, Argentina's Lake District is an exceptional place. There are glorious mountains to climb and ski down, rushing rivers to raft, clear lakes to boat or fish and beautiful national parks to explore. From big-city Bariloche to hippie El Bolsón, the Lake District's towns and cities each have their own distinct geography, architecture and cultural offerings. The region offers something to do in every season and beautiful scenery at every turn, and both vacationing Argentines and foreign backpackers have discovered this wealth of lush landscapes and outdoor activities – so don't you miss it.

The Lake District's original inhabitants were the Puelches and Pehuenches, so named for their dependence on pine nuts from the *pehuén*, or monkey-puzzle tree (which you'll no doubt investigate curiously when you visit). Though Spaniards explored the area in the late 16th century, it was the Mapuche who dominated the region until the 19th century, when European settlers arrived. Today you can still see Mapuche living around here, especially on national park lands.

NEUQUÉN

☎ 0299 / pop 247,000

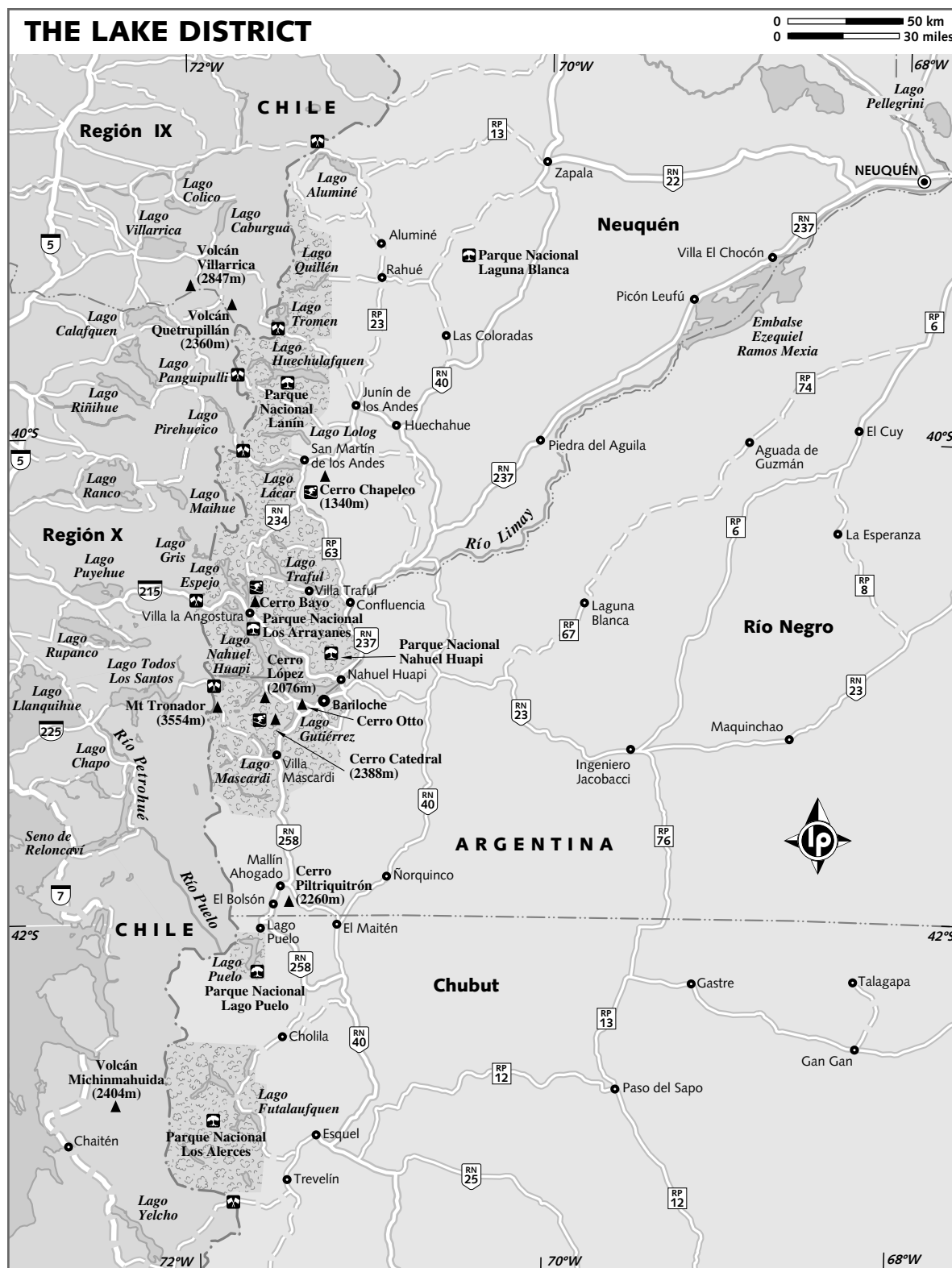
Palindromic Neuquén is a provincial capital nestled in the crook of where the Limay and Neuquén Rivers meet. It's the gateway to Patagonia and the Andean Lake District, and an important regional commercial and agricultural center. Neuquén isn't a major

tourist magnet, but it isn't unpleasant either. There are worse places to pause on your way to somewhere else.

Information

There are several banks with ATMs.

Cambio Pullman (Ministro Alcorta 144) Changes travelers checks.



THROW AWAY YOUR GUIDEBOOK!

Neuquén province has one of the world's richest concentrations of dinosaur bones. A few hints: Plaza Huincul, Villa El Chocón, Centro Paleontológico Lago Barreales – all within a few hours' drive. The greater region also boasts lakes, hot springs, a few *bodegas* (vineyards), a notable bird sanctuary and some world-class fishing.

Interested in more information? Get it yourself, and go!!

Chilean consulate (☎ 442-2727; La Rioja 241).

Immigration office (☎ 422-2061; Santiago del Estero 466)

Post office (cnr Rivadavia & Santa Fe)

Provincial tourist office (☎ 442-4089; www.neuquen.gov.ar; Félix San Martín 182) Sells fishing licenses.

Sights

Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes (cnr Mitre & Santa Cruz; admission free; 🕒 10am-9pm Tue-Fri, 6-10pm Sat & Sun) has exhibits by Argentine and international artists. The small **Museo de la Ciudad** (cnr Independencia & Córdoba; admission free; 🕒 8am-9pm Mon-Fri, 6-10pm Sat & Sun) is all about Neuquén's history.

Sleeping

Residencial Inglés (☎ 442-2252; Félix San Martín 534; s/d US\$12/18) Tidy, good rooms run by a sweet old Polish lady.

Hotel Alcorta (☎ 442-2652; alcortahotel@infovia.com.ar; Ministro Alcorta 84; s/d US\$13/23) A friendly, homey maze of decent, carpeted rooms.

Hostería Belgrano (☎ 442-4311; hosteriabelgrano@infovia.com.ar; Rivadavia 283; s/d US\$13/23) Central, with dark but good-value rooms.

Hotel Ideal (☎ 442-2431; www.interpatagonia.com/hotelideal; Olascoaga 243; s/d US\$16/25; 📺) Well-located, comfortable rooms with cable TV.

Eating & Drinking

El Norte supermarket (cnr Olascoaga & Moreno) For takeout.

Restaurant Alberdi (Alberdi 176; mains under US\$3) Cheap home-style cooking.

Cabildo (Rivadavia 68; mains under US\$3.50) Family-friendly place with pizzas, sandwiches, waffles and omelettes.

La Rayuela (Alberdi 59; mains US\$4.50-7) Modern, large and with a US\$5.50 all-you-can-eat deal.

Meridiano 69 (Rivadavia 69) Dark, loud and trendy place with plenty of cocktails and whiskeys.

Getting There & Around

The airport is 6km away (bus US\$40¢, taxi US\$4). **Aerolíneas Argentinas** (☎ 442-2409; www.aerolineasargentinas.com; Santa Fe 52) and **LADE** (☎ 443-1153; Brown 163) have services.

Neuquén's large, new bus terminal is 4km west of the center; to get downtown take either a 'Pehueche' bus (US\$35¢; buy ticket at Puerta D) or a taxi (US\$2.75). Destinations include Bariloche (US\$15, six hours), Bahía Blanca (US\$13, 7½ hours), Buenos Aires (US\$22, 16 hours), Junín de los Andes (US\$12, five hours), Mendoza (US\$23, 12 hours), Viedma (US\$15, nine hours) and Temuco, Chile (US\$23, 10 hours). Local buses take magnetic cards, easily bought at any kiosk.

JUNÍN DE LOS ANDES

☎ 02972 / pop 12,000

One of the lake district's most pleasant small towns, Junín proclaims itself Argentina's 'trout capital' – and there are indeed some beautiful, trout-filled rivers in the area. It's a tranquil and slow-paced hamlet located on the beautiful Río Chimehuín, 42km north of San Martín de los Andes. There's nothing much to do except wander around, explore the river or mountains and visit gorgeous Parque Nacional Lanín.

Information

There's a bank (ATM) on the plaza.

Club Andino (☎ 491-207) For hiking info; near the tourist office.

Internet (Suárez 445)

Laundry (Ponte 330)

Parques Nacionales (☎ 491-160) Next door to the tourist office.

Post office (cnr Don Bosco & Suárez)

Tourist office (☎ 491-160; turismo@jdeandes.com.ar; Plaza San Martín) Issues fishing permits.

Sights & Activities

Hike 15 minutes from the western edge of town to pine-dotted **Cerro de la Cruz**, where you can wander the 21 stations of the cross (open daylight hours). It's a very creative, well-done effort fusing Christian themes with Mapuche struggles. For indigenous artifacts, visit **Museo Mapuche** (Ponte 540; admission free; 🕒 9am-noon & 3-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat).

Sleeping & Eating

Camping La Isla (☎ 492-029; campsites per person US\$2.25; 🕒 open Dec-Mar) Shady sites and RV plugs (US\$3.25).

Laura Vicuña (☎ 491-149; majandes@smandes.com.ar; campsites per person US\$2.75, cabañas from US\$16) Pleasant and open all year, with sunny riverside sites. Cabañas also available (US\$16 to US\$29).

Residencial Marisa (☎ 491-175; residencialmarisa@deandes.com.ar; Rosas 360; s/d US\$10/13) Good-value rooms; upstairs is brighter. On the highway but relatively peaceful, and a block from the bus terminal.

El Cedro (☎ 02944-15-601-952; elcedro2004@yahoo.com.ar; La Madrid 409; s/d US\$16/20) Simple, small budget rooms with cable TV; just off the plaza.

Posada Pehuén (☎ 491-569; www.camarajuninandes.com.ar/posadapehuen; Suárez 560; s/d US\$18/28) Ten comfortable rooms, all with bathroom and good breakfast, in a family home. Pretty garden in back.

Hostería Chimehuín (☎ 491-132; www.interpatagonia.com/hosteriachimehuin; cnr Suárez & 25 de Mayo; s/d US\$23/33) Grassy grounds, pleasant location and decent rooms; the best have balconies over the gorgeous river. Big with fishing aficionados; apartments available.

Posada Pehuén (Suárez 560; meals from US\$8) Delicious homemade meals in a living-room setting; also wine/cheese nights and weekend tea. Reserve one to two days in advance.

Ruca Hueney (on the plaza; mains US\$4-6) Classy and popular, serving meats, pastas and trout. Takeout counter next door.

Roble Pub (Ginés Ponte 331) A wonderfully rustic and intimate place; after dinner it becomes a bar.

Getting There & Away

The airport is 19km south, toward San Martín de los Andes.

The bus station is three blocks west of the plaza. Destinations include San Martín de los Andes (US\$1.75, 45 minutes), Bariloche (US\$7, three hours) and Neuquén (US\$12, six hours). Chilean destinations include Pucón (US\$15, four hours), Temuco (US\$15, seven hours) and Valdivia (US\$15, eight hours).

PARQUE NACIONAL LANÍN

At 3776m, snowcapped Volcán Lanín is the dominating centerpiece of tranquil Parque Nacional Lanín, where extensive stands of *lenga* (southern beech) and the curious monkey-puzzle tree flourish. Pleistocene glaciers left behind blue finger-shaped lakes, excellent for fishing and camping. There was no entry fee at the time of writing, but this could change. For detailed information and maps,

contact the Parques Nacionales office in Junín or San Martín.

In summer **Lago Huechulafquen** is easily accessible from Junín; there are outstanding views of Volcán Lanín and several excellent hikes. Mapuche-run campgrounds include Raquithue, Piedra Mala and Bahía Cañicul; charges per person are US\$1.75 to US\$2.25. Free campsites also available. Purchase supplies in Junín de los Andes. The forested **Lago Tromen** area also offers good hiking and camping.

From San Martín you can boat west on **Lago Lácar** to Paso Hua Hum and cross by road to Puerto Pirehueico (Chile); there's also bus service. Hua Hum has camping and hiking trails. Fifteen kilometers north of San Martín, serene **Lago Lolog** has good camping and fishing.

Summer 'Traficc' vans from Junín's bus station go all along Lago Huechulafquen to Puerto Canoas (US\$5, twice daily in summer). Buses to Chile over the Hua Hum and Tromen passes can also stop at intermediate points, but are often crowded.

SAN MARTÍN DE LOS ANDES

☎ 02972 / pop 27,000

Argentina's elite *love* San Martín, rowdily crowding the streets of this small fashionable town during their vacations. Nestled between two verdant mountains on the shores of Lago Lácar, San Martín boasts many wood and stone chalet-style buildings, most of which seem to be chocolate shops, ice-cream stores and souvenir boutiques. But behind the touristy streets lie pleasant residential neighborhoods with pretty rose-filled gardens, and the surrounding area has wonderful forested trails perfect for hiking and biking.

Information

There are several ATMs.

Andina Internacional (Capitán Drury 876) Changes traveler's checks.

Parques Nacionales (☎ 427-233; Frey 479) Near the tourist office. Sells fishing licenses.

Post office (cnr Pérez & Roca)

Tourist office (☎ 427-347; www.sanmartindelosandes.gov.ar; San Martín) Near the plaza.

Sights

The 2.5km steep, dusty hike to **Mirador Bandurrias** (US\$35¢; fee in summer only) ends with awesome views of Lago Lácar; be sure to take

a snack or lunch. Tough cyclists can rent bikes at **Rodados** (San Martín 1061; per hr US\$2; 9am-12.30pm & 4-8.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat), and reach the *mirador* (viewing point) in about an hour via dirt roads.

Walk, bike or hitch to **Playa Catrite**, 5km away down RN 234 (there's public transport in summer). Popular with families and young folk, this protected rocky beach has a laid-back restaurant with nice deck; there's camping nearby. Cerro Chapelco, a ski center 20km away, has a downtown **information office** (☎ 427-845; cnr San Martín & Elordi).

From the pier you can take daily boat tours to Paso Hua Hum (round trip US\$26) to access walks and a waterfall, and to Quila Quina (round trip US\$8) for beaches and water sports.

Numerous area tours include trips to nearby *miradores* and beaches, Volcán Lanín, Lagos Huechulafquen and Trafal, Siete Lagos and Cerro Chapelco.

Sleeping

Reserve ahead in high seasons (January to March and July to August).

La Grieta Hostel (☎ 429-669; www.lagrieta.com.ar; Ramayón 767; dm/d US\$7/18) Intimate hostel in a cozy house, with small rooms (one double) sharing bathroom.

Albergue Rukalhue (☎ 427-431; www.rukalhue.com.ar; Juez del Valle 682; dm/s/d US\$7/23/29) Bleak halls, large dining room, industrial feel and simple rooms; doubles have bathroom and TV.

Puma Youth Hostel (☎ 422-443; www.pumahostel.com.ar; Fosbery 535; dm with/without HI card US\$7.50/8.50, d US\$23/24; ☑) Good, clean HI hostel with great kitchen and spacious dorms. Three doubles with bathroom available.

Hostería Cumelen (☎ 427-304; Elordi 931; s/d US\$20/26) A good central choice, with very pleasant rooms sporting cable TV.

Las Lucarnas Hostería (☎ 427-085; hosterialaslucarnas@hotmail.com; Pérez 632; s/d US\$26/29) Beautiful, comfortable rooms with beamed ceilings. Good value.

Casa Alta (☎ 427-456; casaalta@sma.com.ar; Obeid 659; d/tr US\$33/42) Pleasant, with only three simple rooms and a beautiful garden. English, German, Italian and French spoken. Only open December to March.

On the eastern outskirts is spacious **Camping ACA** (☎ 429-430; campsites per person US\$4). There's also good camping at **Playa Catrite** (campsites per person US\$3), 5km south of town.

Eating & Drinking

El Bodegón (Mascardi 892; mains under US\$3.50) Cheap, generous portions of home-cooked food. Simple, very basic menu. Friendly.

Pura Vida (Villegas 745; mains under US\$4) Excellent, mostly vegetarian place serving spinach crepes, vegetable tarts and stuffed squash.

Pulgarcito (San Martín 461; mains US\$4-5.25) Intimate restaurant serving up meat and trout, but best for pasta: ravioli, *ñoqui* and lasagna. Thirty different sauces.

Avataras (☎ 427-104; Ramayón 765; mains US\$4-9) Sophisticated ethnic dishes such as trout in orange sauce, chicken in red curry and crab ravioli. Cozy bar in back.

Ku (San Martín 1053; mains US\$4-10) Elegant, pricey *parrilla* and regional cuisine. Excellent, but with spotty service.

Downtown Matias (cnr Coronel Díaz Arizona & Calderon) Spacious and lofty yuppie magnet, with pool tables, rock music and pricey drinks. Short, steep hike uphill.

Avataras Pub (Ramayón 765) Intimate fancy pub with booths, bar stools and sofas. Plenty of drinks, upscale grub and Marley on the speakers.

Getting There & Away

The **airport** is 23km north of town (taxi US\$12). Airlines include **Aerolíneas Argentinas** (☎ 427-003; www.aerolineasargentinas.com; Capitán Drury 876) and **LADE** (☎ 427-672), at the bus station.

The bus station is five blocks west of Plaza San Martín. Destinations include Junín de los Andes (US\$1.75, 45 minutes), Villa La Angostura (US\$6.25, 2½ hours) and Bariloche (US\$8, four hours). Chilean destinations include Puerto Pirehueico (US\$15, 2½ hours), Panguipulli (US\$15, seven hours) and Temuco (US\$15, eight hours).

VILLA LA ANGOSTURA

☎ 02944 / pop 10,000

Tiny Villa la Angostura is a darling chocolate-box town that takes its name from the *angosta* (narrow) 91m neck of land connecting it to the striking Península Quetrihué. There's no doubt that Villa is touristy, but it is so in a charming way: regional wood-and-stone alpine buildings line the three-block-long main street, and dusty back streets come off the main drag. There's skiing at nearby Cerro Bayo in winter.

El Cruce is the main part of town and contains the bus terminal and most hotels and

businesses; the main street is Av Arrayanes. Woodsy La Villa, with a few restaurants, hotels and a nice beach, is 3km southwest and on the shores of Lago Nahuel Huapi.

Information

Andina (Av Arrayanes 256) Changes traveler's checks.

National park office (☎ 494152; La Villa)

Post office (Av Arrayanes 282, ste 17)

Tourist office (☎ 494124) Across from the bus station.

Sights & Activities

The cinnamon-barked *arrayán*, a myrtle relative, is protected in the small but beautiful **Parque Nacional Los Arrayanes** on the Península Quetrihué (the peninsula itself is located within another much larger national park, Nahuel Huapi). The main *bosque* (forest) of *arrayanes* is situated at the southern tip of the peninsula; it's reachable by a 35-minute boat ride (one-way/round-trip US\$6.50/12) or a relatively easy 12km trail from La Villa. There's a US\$4 entry fee.

Experienced riders should rent a bike to reach the *arrayán* forest. The first section is very steep, but the trail more or less evens out. It's possible to boat either there or back, hiking or biking half the way (buy your return boat ticket in advance). Take food and water; there's an ideal picnic spot next to a lake near the end of the trail.

At the start of the Arrayanes trail, near the beach, a steep 30-minute hike climbs to panoramic viewpoints over Lago Nahuel Huapi.

From the El Cruce part of town, a 3km walk north takes you to **Mirador Belvedere**; 1km further on is **Cascada Inayacal**, a 50m waterfall (you'll need to backtrack and take another path).

Sleeping

The following are all in El Cruce. Prices are for the January–February high season, when you should reserve in advance.

Osa Mayor (☎ 494-304; www.campingosamayor.com.ar; Calle Osa Mayor 230; campsites per person US\$3.25) About 1km from town toward Bariloche. Pleasant grassy sites and common spaces. Also large dorms (US\$5) and bungalows (from US\$39).

Camping Unquehué (☎ 494-922; unquehue@ciudad.com.ar; campsites per person US\$3.50) On the highway across from the YPF station and 600m west of the terminal. Good grassy, shady sites; also rents tents and sleeping pads. Gets crowded in summer.

Italian Hostel (☎ 494-376; www.italianhostel.com.ar; Los Marquis 233; dm US\$6.50, d US\$20-23) Dorms are very large (six to 12 beds) and loud, so go for an upstairs double. Nice garden with berry bushes. Owners know about biking in the area.

Hostel El Hongo (☎ 495-043; www.hostelelhongo.com.ar; Pehuenches 872; dm US\$7) Ten blocks from center is this small place with just 19 beds (no doubles). It's worn around the edges, but has cute carpeted dorms.

Hostal Bajo Cero (☎ 495-454; www.bajocerohostel.com; dm/d US\$8/20) On Av 7 Lagos (1200m from the bus terminal) is this beautiful HI-affiliated hostel with wonderful rooms. Stone and wood accents, bright and airy.

Hostel La Angostura (☎ 494-834; www.hostellaangostura.com.ar; Barbagelata 157; dm/d US\$8/26; 📺) Large but excellent and well-run hostel with comfy lodgelike spaces and clean, modern rooms. Pool table and Saturday BBQs.

Residencial Río Bonito (☎ 494-110; riobonito@ciudad.com.ar; Topa Topa 260; d/apt US\$25/48) Just five good, simple, comfortable rooms with bathroom in this home.

Las Cumbres (☎ 494-945; www.hosterialascumbres.com; Confluencia 944; s/d US\$36/39) One kilometer from town and just off the highway (look for hiker statue). Eight wonderful, cozy rooms; the bright, relaxing common room has great wood trunk details and deck.

Eating & Drinking

Las Varas (Arrayanes 235; mains US\$3-6.50) Attractive high-beamed place with great *parrillada*, pastas and plenty of salads. Inside small shopping mall.

La Buena Vida (Arrayanes 167; mains US\$4.50-10) Choose foods like risotto, soufflé or Hungarian goulash. Also pastas, salads, fish and crepes. Nice front terrace.

Nativa Café (cnr Arrayanes & Inacayal; mains under US\$5) Airy, popular tourist hangout with sports on TV and wood deck to catch the street action.

Tinto Bistro (☎ 494-924; Nahuel Huapi 34; mains US\$6-12) Wonderful, well-prepared food, great cocktails and extensive wine list. Owned by the Dutch princess' Argentine brother; reserve ahead.

La Camorra (☎ 495-554; Cerro Bayo 65; mains US\$6-14) This place has a small but excellent menu of Spanish- and Italian-influenced dishes like *paella*, risotto, pastas and lamb. Also has regional specialties.

Getting There & Around

From the **bus station** (cnr Avs Siete Lagos & Arrayanes) buses depart for Bariloche (US\$3, 1¼ hours) and San Martín de los Andes (US\$6.25, 2½ hours). If heading into Chile, reserve ahead for buses passing through.

There are buses to La Villa (where the boat docks and park entrance are located) every two hours. Bike rentals are available at **Instintos Deportivos** (La Fucias 365; per day US\$6) or at **Pegaso** (Cerro Inacayal 44; per day US\$8).

BARILOCHE

☎ 02944 / pop 97,000

A magnet for visitors in both summer and winter, San Carlos de Bariloche is the Argentine Lake District's largest city. It sits on the shores of beautiful Lago Nahuel Huapi and is ringed by lofty mountain peaks. The city center bustles with touristy streets full of chocolate shops, souvenir stores and trendy boutiques. Bariloche's real attractions, however, are outside the city: Parque Nacional Nahuel Huapi offers spectacular hiking, and there's also great camping, trekking, rafting, fishing and skiing in the area. Despite the heavy touristy feel, Bariloche is a good place to stop, hang out, get errands done and, of course, have some fun.

Information

As in practically every Argentine town and city, the internet is everywhere (and cheap). Banks with ATMs are common.

Cambio Sudamérica (Av Bartolomé Mitre 63) Changes travelers checks.

Chilean consulate (☎ 527-468; Av Juan Manuel de Rosas 180).

Club Andino (☎ 527-966; 20 de Febrero 30) Sells topo maps but does *not* offer hiking information; try Patagonia Andina hostel.

Hospital Privado Regional (☎ 525-000; cnr 24 de Septiembre & 20 de Febrero)

Immigration office (☎ 423-043; Libertad 191)

Information kiosk (☎ 422-623; cnr Perito Moreno & Villegas)

Intendencia del Parques Nacionales (☎ 423-188; San Martín 24) Has information on Parque Nacional Nahuel Huapi.

Librería Cultura (Elfein 78) For Lonely Planet guides.

Municipal tourist office (☎ 429-850; www.bariloche.patagonia.info; Centro Cívico).

Post office (Perito Moreno 175)

Provincial tourist office (☎ 423-178; cnr Av 12 de Octubre & Emilio Frey)

Sights & Activities

The heart of town is the Centro Cívico, a group of well-kept public buildings built of log and stone (architect Ezequiel Bustillo originally adapted Middle European styles into this form of architecture, now associated with the Lake District area). Here you'll find the diverse **Museo de la Patagonia** (admission US\$1; ☎ 10am-12:30pm & 2-7pm Tue-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat), offering good displays of stuffed critters and archaeological artifacts along with an explanation (in Spanish) of Mapuche resistance toward the European conquest.

Rafting and kayaking trips on the Río Limay (easy class II) or Río Manso (class III to IV) have become popular. They're generally 20km day trips and include all gear and transfers. Other popular activities include biking, paragliding, horse-riding and skiing (in winter only, of course).

There are many agencies in town offering area tours. One backpacker-oriented agency is **Overland Patagonia** (☎ 437-654; www.overlandpatagonia.com); it's located at Periko's hostel.

Courses

La Montaña (☎ 524-212; www.lamontana.com; Elfein 251) is a good Spanish school. Group classes cost US\$44 per week; private classes cost US\$11 per hour. Family stays can be arranged; volunteering opportunities available (see website).

Sleeping

All rates are for January, February and holidays, when you should make reservations. If you need to rent camping gear there's **La Bolsa** (☎ 433-431; Diagonal Capraro 1081).

IN BARILOCHE

Arko (☎ 423-109; Güemes 691; campsites per person US\$4.25, r per person US\$16-20) Just three rooms available (one with private bathroom) at this cute, homey place with lovely garden. English spoken and small kitchen available.

Hostel 1004 (☎ 432-228; www.lamoradahostel.com; San Martín 127, 10th fl, ste 1004; dm/d US\$7/20) Simply unbeatable views, both from the rooms and awe-inspiring terrace. Good common areas, friendly service and good atmosphere.

Hostel 41 Below (☎ 436-433; www.hostel41below.com; Juramento 94; dm US\$7, d with shared bathroom US\$21) Intimate hostel with clean dorms, fine doubles (with view) and mellow vibe. Great common room playing good music; run by a laid-back Kiwi.

BARILOCHE

0 ————— 1 km
0 ————— 0.5 miles

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To La Selva Negra (3km); La Morada (7km); Albergue Alaska (7.5km); Cervecería Blest (11km); Lago Gutierrez Hostería (20km); Lfao Lfao Hotel (25km)

Marco Polo Inn (☎ 400-105; www.marcopoloinn.com.ar; Salta 422; dm with/without HI card US\$7/8, d with/without HI card US\$23/26; ☑) Large, modern hostel with all the services, including a bar-restaurant room with pool table. Excellent large doubles with bathrooms and dorms with loft.

La Bolsa del Deporte (☎ 423-529; www.labolsadeldedeporte.com.ar; Palacios 405; dm US\$7.50, d US\$16-20; ☑) Awesome hostel with artistic wood details, good dorms, cozy common areas and great hangout garden with boulder wall.

Periko's (☎ 522-326; www.perikos.com; Morales 555; dm/d US\$8/23; ☑) Beautiful, well-run hostel with pleasant atmosphere, grassy yard and wonderful kitchen. Great dorms and four exceptional doubles with private bathroom. Travel agency next door.

Hostería Portofino (☎ 422-795; Morales 435; s/d US\$16/26) This central, intimate and comfortable place offers great value. Eight small but warm rooms; good breakfast and friendly.

Residencial Güemes (☎ 424-785; fax 435-616; Güemes 715; d US\$25; ☐) A hike up the hill for plain, comfortable rooms, but the relaxing living room has a fireplace and fabulous views. Owner Cholo knows the area well.

Hostería El Viejo Aljibe (☎ 423-316; nsegat@infovia.com.ar; Emilio Frey 571; d/tr US\$29/39) Friendly, homey place with a pretty garden and simple, small and tidy rooms. Five- and six-bed apartments available for US\$58.

Hostería El Ciervo Rojo (☎ 435-241; www.elciervorojo.com.ar; Elfein 115; s/d US\$33/39) Central, attractive place with simple but comfortable rooms

(some with partial views) and a cozy living room area with fireplace. English, Portuguese and Hebrew spoken.

Also recommended:

Patagonia Andina (☎ 421-861; www.elpatagoniaandina.com.ar; Morales 564; dm US\$6-7, s/d with shared bathroom US\$9/18) Basic, crowded dorms in old house. Good trekking information.

Albergue Ruca Hueney (☎ 433-986; www.rucahueney.com; Elflein 396; dm US\$6-7, d US\$21) Casual and decent, with airy kitchen and OK dorms.

Tango Inn (☎ 430-707; www.tangoinn.com.ar; Av 12 de Octubre 1915; dm with/without HI card US\$6.50/8, d with/without HI card US\$23/26; 📺) Located 500m from bus terminal and 1.5km from center; so-so atmosphere.

Albergue El Guacho (☎ 522-464; www.hostelelguacho.com; Belgrano 209; dm/d US\$6.50/20; 📺) Plain hostel but with nice entrance patio.

Hostería La Pastorella (☎ 424-656; www.lapastorella.com.ar; Belgrano 127; s/d US\$33/47) Thirteen fine, carpeted rooms and cozy atmosphere. Sauna available.

OUTSIDE CENTER

La Selva Negra (☎ 441-013; campingselvanegra@infovia.com.ar; campsites per person US\$4) Pleasant, terraced camping sites under trees, some with shelters, though all side by side. It's 3km west of town; take buses 10, 20 or 21.

Albergue Alaska (☎ /fax 461-564; www.visitbariloche.com/alaska; Lillinquen 328; dm US\$6.50-7, d US\$13-14, bungalows US\$16-42; 📺) Large A-frame cabin, but cozy inside. Good services, bike rentals, group bungalows and – best of all – Jacuzzi and sauna. Located in a residential neighborhood 7.5km west of town; take bus 10, 20 or 21.

La Morada (☎ 442-349; www.lamoradahostel.com; dm US\$8, d US\$22-25; 📺) Far up Cerro Otto's flanks, but transport provided from Hostel 1004 (see earlier). Best for those who want peace: it's relaxing, cozy and the views are incomparable.

Lago Gutierrez Hostería (☎ 467-570; www.lagoguierrezhotel.com; Ruta 82, km 16; d US\$39-64; 📺) About 20km southwest of Bariloche, on Lago Gutierrez, is this modern lodge with 16 spacious and very comfortable rooms. Grassy garden and the breakfast is hearty.

Eating

Regional specialties include *jabalí* (wild boar), *ciervo* (venison), and *trucha* (trout).

Simoca (Palacios 264; mains under US\$3.50) Excellent, cheap eatery serving northern Argentine cuisine like empanadas, *locro*, *humitas* and tamales.

El Boliche de Alberto (Villegas 347; mains US\$3.25-5.25) *Parrillada* so good you'll be glad you waited for a table. Its pasta restaurant (Elflein 49) is excellent and equally popular. Large portions all around.

La Andina (Quaglia 95; pizzas US\$3.25-8) Small, no-nonsense corner joint baking up good-value pizzas. Also pastas and empanadas.

El Vegetariano (20 de Febrero 730; mains under US\$4.25; 📺 closed Sunday) Simple homemade pastas, vegetarian plates, salads, fish and fresh juices.

Tarquino (cnr 24 de Septiembre & Saavedra; mains US\$4-8) Hobbit-like (but gorgeously so) restaurant serving meats and pastas, with panna cotta and brownies for dessert.

Familia Weiss (Palacios 167; mains US\$4.50-8.50) Large family restaurant specializing in regional foods like venison and trout. Convenient picture menu.

Días de Zapata (Morales 362; mains US\$5.50-7) Serves Mexican standbys such as quesadillas, fajitas and enchiladas. Festive atmosphere (and happy hour from 7pm to 9pm) makes it easy to down that tequila sunrise.

Kandahar (20 de Febrero 698; mains US\$6.50-9) Intimate gourmet restaurant offering up rabbit in wine sauce, salmon in three-color mousse and raviolis with mushroom sauce.

La Alpina (Perito Moreno 98; mains US\$6.50-13) Cute alpine house serving regional specialties such as boar in mushroom sauce, venison fondue and salmon ravioli. Great-looking pastry case.

Drinking

Wilkenny (San Martín 435) Bariloche's biggest drinking attraction, this popular pub comes with wraparound bar and occasional live music. Serves meals too.

Pilgrim Bar (Palacios 167) Another popular yuppie hangout with old photos, good music and Pilgrim beer. Live music and sidewalk tables.

South Bar (cnr Juramento & 20 de Febrero) Intimate, laid-back bar with Celtic theme, dim lighting and dartboard. Great music and talkative bartender named Pablo.

Cervecería Blest (☎ 461-026; Bustillo km 11; 📺 noon-1am) Touristy brewery/restaurant, but with a nice atmosphere. Try pilsner, lager, bock and even raspberry beers. West of city 11km; take a taxi (US\$4.50) or bus 20.

Map Room (Urquiza 248) Pleasant pub-restaurant decorated with maps from all around the world. Excellent food, including a real American breakfast (run by US-Argentine couple).

Entertainment

The most popular discos – Roket, Cerebro and Pacha – are clustered together by the lake on Av Juan Manuel de Rosas, west of center.

Getting There & Around

AIR

The **airport** (☎ 426-162) is 15km east of town (bus US\$1; taxi US\$10). **Aerolíneas Argentinas** (☎ 422-425; www.aerolineasargentinas.com; Av Bartolomé Mitre 185), **LAN** (☎ 431-077; Av Bartolomé Mitre 500) and **LADE** (☎ 452-124; Villegas 480) provide services.

BICYCLE

Rent bicycles at **La Bolsa** (☎ 433-431; Diagonal Capraro 1081) or **Dirty Bikes** (☎ 425-616; VA O'Connor 681). Rates run US\$6.50/10 per half/full day.

BUS

The bus terminal is 2.5km east of center (bus US\$35¢; taxi US\$3).

Catedral Turismo (☎ 425-444; www.cruceodelagos.cl; Palacios 263) arranges the beautiful 12-hour bus–boat combination tour over the Andes to Puerto Varas (US\$160).

Destination	Duration (hr)	Cost (US\$)
Buenos Aires	20	36
Comodoro Rivadavia	15	30
El Bolsón	2	4.50
Esquel	5	10
Puerto Madryn	13	31
San Martín de los Andes	4	8
Trelew	12	38
Viedma	14	20
Villa La Angostura	1-1½	3
Osorno (Chile)	5	16
Puerto Montt (Chile)	7	16

CAR

There are plenty of car rental agencies in town. Car-rental rates run from US\$50 (with 200km); ask for weekly discounts.

TRAIN

The **train station** (☎ 423-172) is next to the bus terminal. There's train service to Viedma (US\$10/23 in *turista*/Pullman class, 17 hours) twice weekly.

PARQUE NACIONAL NAHUEL HUAPI

Lago Nahuel Huapi, a glacial relic over 100km long, is the centerpiece of this gorgeous national park. To the west, 3554m Monte

Tronador marks the Andean crest and Chilean border. Humid Valdivian forest covers its lower slopes, while summer wildflowers blanket alpine meadows.

The 60km **Circuito Chico** is probably Parque Nacional Nahuel Huapi's most popular excursion. Every 20–30 minutes, bus 20 (from San Martín and Morales) does half the circuit along Lago Nahuel Huapi to end at Puerto Pañuelos, where boat trips leave a few times daily for beautiful **Puerto Blest**, touristy **Isla Victoria** and pretty **Península Quetrihué** (see p135). Bus 10 goes the other way, inland via **Colonia Suiza** (a small woodsy Swiss community), and ends at Bahía López, where you can hike a short way to the tip of the peninsula Brazo de la Tristeza. In summer, bus 11 does the whole Circuito, connecting Puerto Pañuelos with Bahía López, but in winter you can walk the 6km stretch along the nonbusy highway, with much of that being on a wonderfully woodsy nature trail. There's a beautiful two-hour side hike to Villa Tacul, on the shores of Lago Nahuel Huapi. It's best to walk from Bahía López to Puerto Pañuelos rather than the other way around, since many more buses head back to Bariloche from Pañuelos. Get an area map at Bariloche's tourist office.

Skiing is a popular winter activity from mid-June to October. **Cerro Catedral** (☎ 02944-423-776; www.catedralaltapatagonia.com), some 20km west of town, is one of the biggest ski centers in South America. It boasts more than 50 runs, 40 lifts, a cable car, gondola and plenty of services (including rentals). The best part, however, is the views: peaks surrounding the lakes are gloriously visible.

Hard-core cyclists can bike the whole paved circuit. See left for bike rentals.

Hikers can climb Cerros Otto (two to three hours), Catedral (four hours), López (three hours) and Campanario (30 minutes), as well as Monte Tronador (six hours from Pampa Linda). If trekking, check with Club Andino (p136) or Patagonia Andina (opposite) for trail conditions; snow can block trails even in summer. If camping, get an area map (detailing campsites) at Bariloche's tourist office.

EL BOLSÓN

☎ 02944 / pop 22,000

Hippies rejoice – there's a must-see destination for you in Argentina, and it's called El Bolsón. Within its liberal and artsy borders

live alternate-lifestyle folks from all over the country who've made their town a 'non-nuclear zone' and 'ecological municipality.' Located about 120km south of Bariloche, El Bolsón is peaceful, plain and unpretentious, surrounded by dramatically jagged mountain peaks that host activities for nature-lovers. Its economic prosperity, however, comes from a warm microclimate and fertile soil, both of which support a cadre of organic farms devoted to hops, cheese, soft fruits such as raspberries, and orchards. This, and El Bolsón's true personality, can be seen at its famous **feria artesanal** (craft market), where creative crafts and healthy food are sold; catch it on Plaza Pagano on Tuesdays, Thursdays and weekends (best on Saturdays).

The **tourist office** (☎ 492-604; www.elbolson.gov.ar) is next to Plaza Pagano. Get trail information at **Club Andino** (☎ 492-600; Av Sarmiento), near Roca. There are two ATMs in town. The post office is opposite the tourist office.

For area activities like rafting on Río Azul, paragliding and horse-riding, contact **Grado 42** (☎ 493-124; Av Belgrano 406) or **Patagonia Aventura** (☎ 492-513; Pablo Hube 418).

Sleeping

All rates listed are for summer, when you should book ahead. Surrounding mountains offer plenty of camping opportunities (other than the ones here), including at *refugios* (US\$1.50 to US\$2; also bunks for US\$3.25 to US\$5.25).

Camping & Hostel Refugio Patagonia (☎ 15-411061 for camping, ☎ 15-635-463 for dm; www.refugio-patagonico.com.ar; Islas Malvinas s/n; campsites per person US\$3, dm US\$6.50; 🏠) Premier camping, with both sunny and shady sites, mountain views and expansive fields. Also has beautiful dorms with great kitchen and dining room area. One queen-bed double available (US\$16).

Camping La Chacra (☎ 492-111; lachacra@elbolson.com; Av Belgrano; campsites per person US\$3.25, cabañas US\$33) This well-tended campground has pleasant, grassy and shady sites in a fruit orchard. There's a small dining room (food available).

Albergue El Pueblito (☎ 493-560; www.hostels.org.ar; dm with/without HI card US\$4.50/5.25; d US\$13-20) Cozy and tranquil countryside hostel with creaky-floor dorms (bring ear plugs). Great hangout area; bike rentals and cabaña (US\$33) available. Take a bus (it's 4km north of town) or *remise* (US\$1.75).

Albergue Sol de Valle (☎ 492-087; albahube@hotmail.com; 25 de Mayo 2345; dm/s/d US\$5/8/13) Impersonal and lacking interesting decor, this 55-bed *albergue* (youth hostel) has tiled halls, small rooms and kitchen access.

La Casa del Viajero (☎ 492-092; aporro@elbolson.com; near Libertad and Las Flores, Barrio Usina; dm US\$6.50) Seeking a friendly, laid-back vibe with few amenities? Head to artist Augustin Porro's rustic plot of land – it's all 'natural' and homemade. Located 20m north of the pedestrian bridge (look for a sign over the bushy entrance).

Hospedaje Salinas (☎ 492-396; Roca 641; r per person US\$6.50) Five no-frills older rooms (all with shared bathroom), tiny cooking facilities and nice garden patio in which to hang and meet other travelers.

Steiner (☎ 492-224; Av San Martín 670; s/d US\$10/20; 🏠) South of town about 2km (*remise* US\$1.25) is this peaceful hotel on grassy grounds. Rooms are simple and unmemorable, but there's a pool. Meals available.

Residencial Los Helechos (☎ 492-262; Av San Martín 3248; s US\$16, d US\$23-29, apt US\$39) Has eight wonderfully spotless, modern rooms, a flowery garden and kitchen access. Some doubles have kitchenette. Look for the 'Kioscón' sign.

La Posada de Hamelin (☎ 492-030; www.posadadehamelin.com.ar; Granollers 2179; s/d US\$20/26) Wonderfully cozy rooms in this sweet, friendly and vine-covered family home. Excellent breakfast (US\$2.25).

Cabañas Bungalow Montes (☎ 455-227; www.montes-bolsonweb.com.ar; Azcuénaga 155; apt US\$26-33, cabañas US\$45-58) Three cute and well-tended A-frame cabañas available (six to eight beds). Also two apartments (two to four beds). All have kitchen.

Eating

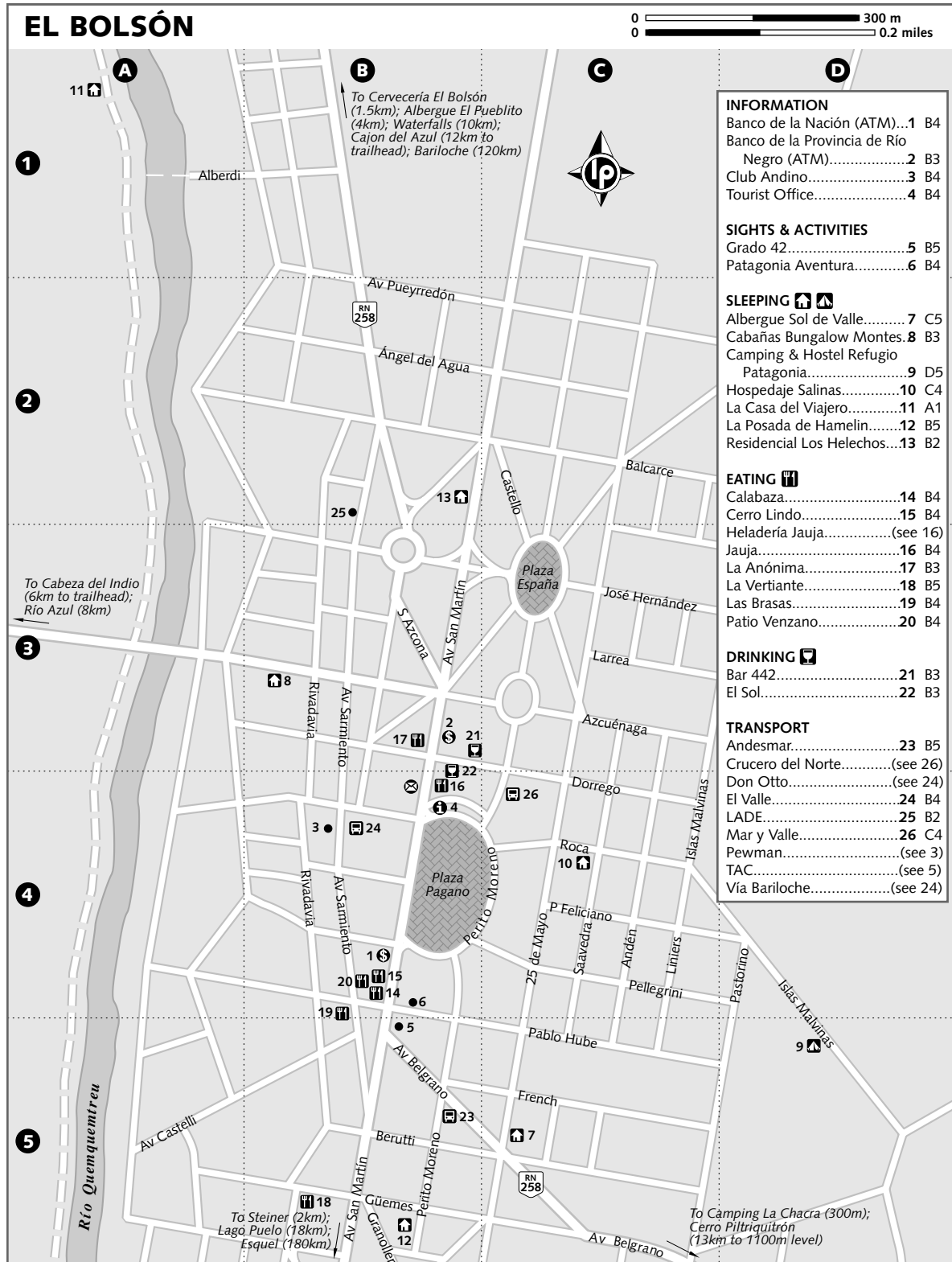
Food at the *feria artesanal* is not only great value; it's also tasty and healthy.

La Anónima supermarket (cnr Av San Martín & Dorrego) Cheap takeout.

La Vertiente (cnr Güemes & Rivadavia; US\$3-6) Traditional menu, with well-priced homemade pastas and trout dishes. Excellent.

Patio Venzano (cnr Av Sarmiento & Pablo Hube; US\$3.25-6.50) Great cozy wood atmosphere and nice patio add to the tasty *parrillada* and pasta offerings here.

Calabaza (Av San Martín 2518; mains US\$3.25-6.50) Mixed reviews, but still draws them in with regional dishes and vegetarian offerings like squash *milanesas*. Cozy, with sidewalk tables.



Cerro Lindo (Av San Martín 2524; mains US\$3.25-10) Next door to Calabaza and serving meat, pastas and local specialties.

Las Brasas (cnr Av Sarmiento & Pablo Hube; US\$3.25-8) Long-standing *parrilla*; not the best nor the worst, but the most consistent in town.

Jauja (Av San Martín 2867; US\$3.50-9) Modern, bustling place with highly varied menu. Next

door, Heladería Jauja is definitely worth the long wait. Wi-fi zone.

Drinking

El Bolsón is too small to be big on nightlife. **Cervecería El Bolsón** (☎ 492-595; Ruta 258) This relaxing place brews about a dozen beers and serves food. It's 2 km north of town.

Peek into bar **El Sol** (Dorrego 423) or hop across the street to **Bar 442** (Dorrego 442) for weekend dancing.

Getting There & Around

It's unlikely you'll fly to El Bolsón on **LADE** (☎ 492-206; cnr Av Sarmiento & Hernandez, in shopping center).

There's no central bus terminal; several bus companies are spread around town including Crucero del Norte, Don Otto, Mar y Valle, TAC and Via Barilcohe. **El Valle** (cnr Av Sarmiento & Roca) has the most departures. Destinations include Bariloche (US\$5, two hours), Esquel (US\$5, two hours), Puerto Madryn (US\$36, 12 hours) and Buenos Aires (from US\$37, 19 hours). In summer, reserve your ticket in advance.

Rent bikes at Pewman, at the **Club Andino** (☎ 492-600; Av Sarmiento), for US\$5/8 a half/full day (summer only).

AROUND EL BOLSÓN

The spectacular granite ridge of 2260m **Cerro Piltriquitrón** looms to the east like the back of some prehistoric beast. From the 1100m level, reached by taxi (US\$25 round-trip with 1½ hour wait), a further 30-minute hike leads to **Bosque Tallado** (admission US\$1.25), a shady grove of about 30 figures carved from logs. Another 15-minute walk uphill is Refugio Piltriquitrón, where you can have a drink or even sack down (bunk US\$3.25, bring sleeping bag; camping free first two nights, then US\$1 per night). From here it's two hours to the summit. The weather is very changeable, so bring layers.

On a ridge 6km west of town is **Cabeza del Indio** (admission US\$0.35), a rock outcrop resembling a man's profile; the trail has great views of the Río Azul and Lago Puelo. A taxi to the trailhead is US\$3.50. There are also a couple of **waterfalls** (admission each US\$35¢) about 10km north of town.

A good three-hour hike reaches the narrow canyon of **Cajón del Azul**, which boasts some absolutely glorious swimming holes (bring a swimsuit!). At the end is a friendly *refugio* where you can eat or stay for the night (bunks US\$5.25, camping US\$1.35). Town buses drop you a 15-minute steep, dusty walk from the Cajón del Azul trailhead (US\$1), or take a *remise* (US\$5.25).

About 18km south of El Bolsón is windy **Parque Nacional Lago Puelo** (☎ 499-064; admission US\$2). You can camp, stay at a *refugio*, take a boat tour or a ferry to the Chilean border

(US\$8 return). In summer, regular buses run from El Bolsón (US\$75¢).

ESQUEL

☎ 02945 / pop 25,000

Homely Esquel doesn't look like much at first glance, but it boasts a dramatic setting at the foothills of western Chubut province and is the transition point from Andean forest to the Patagonian steppe. It's also the starting gate for the Old Patagonian Express and gateway to Parque Nacional Los Alerces. There's good hiking in the area, and the pleasant Welsh stronghold, Trevelin, is a good day trip away.

Information

Banks with ATMs are located on Alvear and on 25 de Mayo near Alvear.

Chilean consulate (☎ 451-189; Molinari 754)

Club Andino (☎ 453-248; Pellegrini 787)

Post office (Alvear 1192) Next to the tourist office.

Tourist office (☎ 451-927; www.esquel.gov.ar; cnr Alvear & Sarmiento)

Sights & Activities

La Trochita (Old Patagonian Express; ☎ 451-403; www.latrochita.org.ar) is Argentina's famous narrow-gauge steam train. It does short tourist runs from the station near the corner of Brown and Roggero to Nahuel Pan, 20km east (US\$8, one hour). At the other end of the tracks, 140km away, is El Maitén; the railroad's workshops and a museum are here (US\$26, nine hours). Check the website or tourist office for current schedules.

For adventure tours try **EPA** (☎ 454-366; cnr Rivadavia & Roca). Good hikes in the area go to Laguna La Zeta (one hour), Cerro La Cruz (1½ hours) and Cerro Nahuel Pan (one day). For mountain guides contact **Cholila Mountain Explorers** (☎ 456-296; www.cholilaexplorers.com) at Piuke Mapu Hostel.

Sleeping

El Hogar del Mochilero (☎ 452-166; Roca 1028; campsites per person US\$2.25, dm US\$3.25) A shady little camping paradise; kitchen available. Also huge 31-bed dorm; bring sleeping bag. If Carlos isn't around, check the house across the street.

Casa del Pueblo (El Batxoky; ☎ 450-581; www.epa.adventure.com.ar; San Martín 661; dm US\$6-8, d US\$18) A bit mazelike and worn, but a decent hostel with cozy common areas. Good kitchen and grassy garden. Bike rentals available.

Piuke Mapu Hostel (☎ 456-296; www.piukemapu.com; Urquiza 929; dm US\$6.50) Small hostel that's a bit rough around the edges, but friendly and intimate. Good mountain-climbing information available.

Casa de Familia Rowlands (☎ 452-578; Rivadavia 330; r per person US\$6.50) Friendly with three homey, basic rooms (two share bathrooms). About seven blocks from center.

Residencial El Cisne (☎ 452-256; Chacabuco 778; s/d US\$8/15) Nine comfortable and quiet rooms in two buildings (ring at No 777 if no answer at No 778). Limited dining facilities.

Hotel Argentino (☎ 452-237; 25 de Mayo 862; s/d US\$8/16) Atmospheric old digs with personality, filled with antiques. Odd but cool place, with eclectic bar attached (see following section).

Parador Lago Verde (☎ 452-251; Volta 1081; s/d US\$10/20) Six tiny and dark rooms, but there's a peaceful grassy garden. About six blocks from center.

Eating & Drinking

La Anónima supermarket (cnr Roca & 9 de Julio) Cheap takeout.

María Castaña (cnr 25 de Mayo & Rivadavia; mains US\$3-5) Busy café with sidewalk tables and plenty of menu choices. Great overstuffed chairs in back.

La Española (Rivadavia 740; mains US\$3.25-6.50) Locally recommended place for good *parrillada* using choice meats.

Dionisio (Fontana 656; mains US\$3.25-8) Tranquil, artsy restaurant that's big on crepes, both savory and sweet. Also open at 6pm for tea.

Mirsoles (Pellegrini 643; mains US\$3.50-8) Small and intimate upscale spot with natural foods such as stuffed squash and soy *milanesas*. In residential neighborhood.

Hotel Argentino (25 de Mayo 862) Old-time Wild West saloon bar and pool tables. There's a disco in back. Funky.

Morena (San Martín & Roca; ☎ closed Mon) More like a yuppie watering hole, with brick atmosphere and old wood tables. Food available.

Getting There & Around

The airport is 20km east of town (taxi US\$8). **Aerolíneas Argentinas** (☎ 45-3614; Fontana 408) and **LADE** (☎ 452-124; Alvear 1085) provide services.

The bus terminal is six blocks north of center, at the corner of Alvear and Brun. Destinations include Parque Nacional Los Alerces (US\$2.75, 1½ hours), El Bolsón (US\$5.25, two hours), Bariloche (US\$9, four hours), Puerto

Madryn (US\$29, nine hours) and Comodoro Rivadavia (US\$18, nine hours). Buses go to Trevelin (US\$75¢, 30 minutes) from the terminal, stopping along Av Alvear on their way south.

Bike rentals are available at **Casa del Pueblo** (El Batxoky; ☎ 450-581; www.epaadventure.com.ar; San Martín 661).

TREVELIN

☎ 02945 / pop 6000

Historic Trevelin is a calm, sunny and laid-back community only 24km south of Esquel. The **tourist office** (☎ 480-120) is located on Plaza Fontana.

Landmarks include the historical **Museo Regional** (admission US\$75¢; ☎ 9am-9pm), in a restored brick mill, and **Capilla Bethel**, a Welsh chapel from 1910. **Tumba de Malacara** (admission US\$1.75; ☎ 10am-12:30pm & 2-8pm), two blocks northeast of the plaza, is a monument to the horse that saved John Evans, Trevelin's founder.

For camping find **Policial** (campsites per person US\$2; ☎ closed winter), with fine grassy, shady sites (they're building cabañas). From Av San Martín 600 block, walk two blocks west on Coronel Holdich and turn left down the gravel road (the Esquel bus goes beyond the plaza and stops at the intersection).

The best budget accommodation in town is friendly and serene **Hostel Casaverde** (☎ 480-091; www.casaverdehostel.com.ar; Los Alerces s/n; dm with/without HI card US\$6.50/7, d US\$20/23, cabaña US\$48-65), at the top of a small hill. The rooms, kitchen, atmosphere and views are so welcoming you'll be tempted to extend your stay.

You can have afternoon tea (4pm to 7pm) and conquer a platter of pastries at **Nain Maggie** (☎ 480-232; Perito Moreno 179) and **Las Mutisias** (☎ 480-165; San Martín 170), while keeping your ears pricked for locals speaking Welsh.

Hourly buses run from Esquel to Trevelin (US\$75¢).

PARQUE NACIONAL LOS ALERCES

West of Esquel, the spacious Andean **Parque Nacional Los Alerces** (admission US\$4) protects extensive stands of *alerce* (*Fitzroya cupressoides*), a large and long-lived conifer of humid Valdivian forests. Other common trees include cypress, incense cedar, southern beeches and *arrayán*. The *colihue* (a bamboolike plant) undergrowth is almost impenetrable.

The receding glaciers of Los Alerces' peaks, which barely reach 2300m, have left nearly

THROW AWAY YOUR GUIDEBOOK!

Follow in the footsteps of Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid and head to Cholila, which looks to open up as a tourist attraction in the years to come. Right now there's not much for the traveler except a teahouse and the outlaws' decrepit log cabin, but the region is growing and a hostel may be built at some point (check with the guys at Piuke Mapu Hostel in Esquel). For general information there's Cholila's **Casa de Informes** (☎ 498-040; RP 15 at RP 71).

pristine lakes and streams with charming vistas and excellent fishing. Westerly storms drop nearly 3000mm of rain annually, but summers are mild and the park's eastern zone is much drier. An **interpretative center** (☎ 02945-471-015) provides information.

The most popular day-long tour sails from Puerto Limonao (on Lago Futalaufquen) up the Río Arrayanes to Lago Verde (US\$36). Launches from Puerto Chucao (on Lago Menéndez) cover the second segment of the trip to **El Alerzal**, an accessible stand of rare *alerces* (US\$23). A two-hour stopover permits a hike around a loop trail that passes Lago Cisne and an attractive waterfall to end up at **El Abuelo** (Grandfather), a 57m tall, 2600-year-old *alerce*. You can buy boat tickets in Esquel.

There are organized **campgrounds** (campsites per person US\$3-6.50) at Los Maitenes, Lago Futalaufquen, Bahía Rosales, Lago Verde and Lago Rivadavia. Free sites exist near some of these locations. Lago Krüger, reached by foot (12 hours) or taxi boat from Villa Futalaufquen, has a campground, restaurant and expensive *hostería*. See Esquel's tourist office for a complete list of accommodation options.

For getting there and away information, see Getting There & Around under Esquel.

PATAGONIA

Few places in the world inspire the imagination like mystical Patagonia – and each year more and more travelers are experiencing awesome adventures down here. You can cruise bleak RN 40 (South America's Route 66), watch an active glacier calving house-sized icebergs and hike among some of the

most fantastic mountain scenery in the world. The sky is wide, the clouds are airbrushed and the late sunsets can tingle your spirit. Patagonia's other highlights include Welsh teahouses, petrified forests, quirky outpost towns, rich oilfields, penguin colonies, huge sheep *estancias* and some of the world's largest trout.

Patagonia was thought to be named after the Tehuelche people's moccasins, which made their feet appear huge – in Spanish, *pata* means foot. Geographically, the region is mostly a windy, barren expanse of flat nothingness that offers rich wildlife only on its eastern coast, and rises into the spectacular Andes way into its western edge. It's attracted an interesting range of famous personalities, however, from Charles Darwin to Ted Turner to Bruce Chatwin to Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid. But despite the big names, Patagonia maintains one of the lowest population densities in the world.

VIEDMA

☎ 02920 / pop 49,500

Patagonia's eastern gateway is this unremarkable provincial capital. Viedma is the finish line for January's **La Regata del Río Negro**, the world's longest kayak race, which starts 500km away in Neuquén. Other attractions include a couple of museums and a scenic riverside walk. Nearby Carmen de Patagones (p146) takes most of the family charm.

The **tourist office** (☎ 427-171; cnr Costanera & Colón) is by the river. There's a **post office** (cnr 25 de Mayo & San Martín), ATMs and plenty of internet access.

Sights & Activities

The history of local indigenous cultures can be seen at **Museo Gobernador Eugenio Tello** (San Martín 263; admission free; ☎ 9am-1pm & 5:30-8:30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-noon & 5:30-8:30pm Sat Dec-Mar). **Museo Cardenal Cagliero** (Rivadavia 34; admission free; 8am-noon Mon, 8am-noon & 7-9pm Tue-Thu) has some amazing ceiling paintings and a neat fish-vertebrae cane.

Summer activities include **kayaking** (walk north along the shore and look for rentals) and weekend **catamaran rides** (US\$3.25).

The Atlantic shoreline, Patagonia's oldest lighthouse and the town of **Balneario El Cóndor** lie 30km southeast of Viedma; daily buses go from Plaza Alsina (US\$1). A further 30km south is **Punta Bermeja**, a sea-lion colony. In summer only, buses from Viedma drop you 3km from the colony (US\$1.75).



Triton Turismo (☎ 431-131; Namuncurá 78) does tours of the area; it also rents cars for about US\$30 per day (with 100km).

Sleeping & Eating

Camping Municipal (☎ 15-608-403; campsites per person US\$1.50) Northwest of center about 1km; riverside with bleak gravel sites (taxis US\$1.75).

Residencial Tosca (☎ 428-508; residencialtosca@hotmail.com; Alsina 349; s/d US\$15/21; 🚽) Small, simple rooms with cable TV and breakfast.

Hotel Spa (☎ 430-459; spaiturburu@nonline.com.ar; 25 de Mayo 174; d US\$23) Mazelike place with tiny rooms; despite 'spa' services (extra) it's hardly luxurious.

Hotel Austral (☎ 422-615; www.hoteles-austral.com.ar; cnr 25 de Mayo & Villarino; s/d US\$36/41) For more comfort snag a carpeted, no-frills room here; some have river views.

La Anónima (cnr Alberdi & Rivadavia) For cheap takeout.

Camila's Café (cnr Saavedra & Buenos Aires; snacks under US\$3.25) Good for sandwiches and drinks; popular.

Dragon (366 Buenos Aires; meals under US\$4) Good *tenedor libre*.

Getting There & Around

The airport is 4km southwest of town (taxis US\$4). **LADE** (☎ 424-420; Saavedra 576) and **Aerolíneas Argentinas** (☎ 422-018; www.aerolineasargentinas.com) have services.

Viedma's bus terminal is 13 blocks south of the center, at the corner of Guido and Perón. Buses (US\$25¢) and taxis (US\$1.50) head downtown. Destinations include Bahía Blanca (US\$6.50, 3½ hours), Puerto Madryn (US\$15, six hours), Comodoro Rivadavia (US\$30, 12 hours), Bariloche (US\$20, 14 hours) and Buenos Aires (US\$25, 13 hours).

The **train station** (☎ 422-130) is on the south-east outskirts of town; there's twice-weekly service to Bariloche (US\$10/23 in *turista*/Pullman class, 15 hours).

CARMEN DE PATAGONES

☎ 02920 / pop 18,500

Just across the Río Negro is picturesque 'Patagones,' with historic cobbled streets and lovely colonial buildings. There's not much to do other than stroll around and take in the relaxing atmosphere, and it's just a short boat ride from busy Viedma. For walking maps visit the **tourist office** (☎ 461-777, ext 296; Bynon 186).

Across from the boat dock is the good **Museo Histórico** (admission free; ☎ 9:30am-12:30pm & 7-9pm Mon-Sat); check out the cane with hidden stabber. Salesians built the **Iglesia Parroquial Nuestra Señora del Carmen** (1883); its image of the Virgin, dating from 1780, is southern Argentina's oldest. Note flags captured in the 1827 victory over the Brazilians.

Residencial Reggiani (☎ 461-065; Bynon 422; s/d US\$10/16) has small, decent rooms (upstairs they're brighter). Better is **Hotel Percaz** (☎ 464-104; hotel@hotelpercuz.com.ar; Comodoro Rivadavia 384; s/d US\$13/20), offering good budget rooms, though carpets are worn.

The **bus terminal** (cnr Barbieri & Méjico) has services to Buenos Aires and Puerto Madryn (among other places) but long-distance buses are more frequent from Viedma.

Patagones is connected to Viedma by frequent buses, but the *balsa* (passenger boat) is more scenic. It crosses the river every few minutes (US\$30¢, two minutes).

PUERTO MADRYN

☎ 02965 / pop 66,000

Founded by Welsh settlers in 1886, this sheltered port city owes much of its popularity to nearby wildlife sanctuary Península Valdés. It holds its own as a modest beach destination, however, and boasts a lively tourist street scene and popular boardwalk. From June to mid-December visiting right whales take center stage.

Information

There's a **tourist office** (☎ 453-504; www.madryn.gov.ar; Av Roca 223) both in the center and at the bus station. There are many banks with ATMs, and **Cambio Thaler** (Av Roca 493) changes travelers' checks.

Sights & Activities

The **Museo Provincial de Ciencias Naturales y Oceanográfico** (cnr Domencq García & Menéndez) was being remodeled at research time, but should be worth a visit. Well-done **EcoCentro** (☎ 457-470; Julio Verne 3784; admission US\$5; 🕒 5-9pm) offers excellent exhibits of local sea life, complete with touch-pool and lofty glass tower. Take the Linea 2 bus to the last stop, then walk 1km (taxis US\$3).

Other area activities include kayaking, windsurfing and horse-riding. Scuba diving is also possible; dives start at US\$40 (try Scuba Duba at Blvd Brown 893 or Lobo Larsen at Hipólito Yrigoyen 144). You can pedal 17km

southeast to **Punta Loma** (admission US\$3.25), a sea-lion rookery, or 19km northwest to **Playa El Doradillo**, which offers close-up whale-watching in season. See p148 for bike rentals.

Tours

Countless agencies sell tours to Península Valdés (p148) and Punta Tombo (p150). All charge a set rate of US\$37. Most hotels and hostels will also offer tours; in choosing, it's always best to get recommendations from fellow travelers. Ask how large the bus was, if it came with an English-speaking guide, where they ate and what they saw where – different tour companies often visit different locations. And remember to take water, as it's a long drive to both reserves.

Sleeping

Prices listed are for the high season, approximately October to March. In January it's a good idea to reserve ahead.

ACA Camping (☎ 452-952; campsites for 2/4 US\$7.50/10, d US\$18; ☒ Sep-Apr) Shady sandy sites; food service available. South of center 4km; take Linea 2 bus to last stop, then walk 800m (taxi US\$2.75).

La Tosca (☎ 456-133; www.latoscahostel.com; Sarmiento 437; dm US\$6.50, d US\$20-23; ☒ closed May) Small hostel with good common area and simple, neat rooms lining a nice grassy yard. Free pickup from bus station.

El Gualicho (☎ 454-163; www.elgualicho.com.ar; Marcos A Zar 480; dm with/without HI card US\$7/8, d with/without HI card US\$26/28; ☒) Great place with clean dorms,

PUERTO MADRYN

0 300 m
0 0.2 miles

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good-vibe living room, spacious kitchen and grassy garden. Bike rentals and free pickup from bus station.

Hostel Viajeros (☎ 456-457; www.hostelviajeros.com; Gobernador Maíz 545; dm/d US\$8/25; 📺) Long strip of no-nonsense rooms (all with bath) facing a grassy lawn. Large *quincha* (cabaña) with dining area and BBQ. Doubles are small; free pickup from bus terminal.

Vaskonia (☎ 472-581; buce23@infovia.com.ar; 25 de Mayo 43; s/d US\$20/23) Long-running but remodeled standby with tight, tidy rooms around a small plant area. Good location just three blocks from bus station.

Casa del Pueblo (☎ 472-500; www.madryncasadepeblo.com.ar; Av Roca 475; s/d US\$26/33) Just five simple and homey rooms available at this remodeled older home; two have boardwalk views.

Hostería Torremolinos (☎ 453-215; patagoniatorremolinos.com; Marcos A Zar 64; s/d US\$49/55; 📺) Comfortable, cozy and clean guesthouse with six beautiful rooms, tastefully decorated common areas and friendly proprietors.

Also recommended:

El Retorno (☎ 456-044; www.elretornohostel.com.ar; Mitre 798; dm/d US\$7/26) Decent digs with tiled halls and small common spaces.

Posada del Catalejo (☎ 475-224; info@posadadelcatalejo.com.ar; Mitre 446; dm/d US\$8/23) Small and unmemorable; rough around the edges. Doubles share baths.

Eating & Drinking

Supermarkets include **El Norte** (28 de Julio), near Mitre, and **La Anónima** (cnr Hipólito Yrigoyen & 25 de Mayo).

Vernardino (Blvd Brown; mains US\$3-8) Best for its breezy wood deck, which overlooks the beach. Cooks up breakfast, pizza and sandwiches; has fancier menu for dinner. It's near Perloti.

Estela (Roque Sáenz Peña 27; mains US\$3.25-11) Popular, intimate and excellent *parrillada*; also serves seafood and pastas.

La Barra (Blvd Brown 779; mains US\$4-8) Large popular place with meats, pastas, salads, outdoor tables and sea views.

Mr Jones (9 de Julio 116; mains US\$4-8) Popular bistro with European specialties (think goulash) along with pizzas, burgers and dozens of imported beers like Negro Modela and Guinness.

Mar y Meseta (Av Roca 485; mains US\$4.25-13) Tasty dishes like fish in honey, rabbit in beer and lamb shish kebab. Nice wood deck in front.

Mariscos del Atlántico (Av Rawson 288; mains US\$4.50-10) Pretty good seafood dishes, with great local

ambience. Hard to find: behind Club Nautico, past arches 20m and up the stairs.

El Clásico (cnr 28 de Julio & 25 de Mayo; mains US\$5.25-8.50) Old-fashioned corner joint serving lamb with herbs, crab ravioli and fish in prawn sauce.

Margarita Bar (cnr Av Roca & Roque Sáenz Peña) Hip bar with brick walls, international cocktails and simple food menu. Live jazz on Wednesdays.

La Oveja Negra (Hipólito Yrigoyen 144) Live music, pub grub and plenty of drinks at this intimate venue.

Getting There & Around

Madryn has an airport (shuttles US\$1.50, taxis US\$5), but most flights arrive 65km south at Trelew (shuttles US\$5, taxis US\$23). **Aerolíneas Argentinas** (☎ 451-998; www.aerolineasargentinas.com; Av Roca 427) and **LADE** (☎ 451-256; Av Roca 119) have services.

The bus station is on the corner of Hipólito Yrigoyen and San Martín. Destinations include Puerto Pirámide (US\$3.25, 1½ hours), Trelew (US\$2.25, one hour), Comodoro Rivadavia (US\$15, seven hours), Viedma (US\$20, six hours), Esquel (US\$28, nine hours), Bariloche (US\$40, 15 hours) and Buenos Aires (US\$50, 19 hours).

Rent cars at **Hertz** (☎ 474-287; Av Roca 115), **Budget** (☎ 451-491; Av Roca 27) and **Fiorasi** (☎ 456300; Av Roca 165). Cheapest rates run around US\$60 per day with 400km. For bike rentals check **XT Mountain Bike** (☎ 472-232; Av Roca 742; per day US\$6.50) or **Na Praia** (☎ 455-633; Blvd Brown 860; per day US\$8).

RESERVA FAUNÍSTICA PENÍNSULA VALDÉS

☎ 02965

Gouged by two large bays, this oddly shaped peninsula is mostly a flat, bleak and dry landscape of unrelenting low shrubs. Driving along, you'll spot guanacos and perhaps some rheas or armadillos. Once you get to the coastlines, however, the real celebrity wildlife awaits: sea lions, elephant seals, southern right whales, Commerson's dolphins, Magellanic penguins and – if you're very, very lucky – orcas (who have been filmed here snatching pinnipeds straight off the beach) can be seen. June through mid-December is whale-watching season, penguins waddle around from October to March, and elephant seals and sea lions lounge around all year. Commerson's dolphins are best September to November, while dusky dolphins are spotted all year. The orca phenomenon happens during high tide from February to April – and you have

about a 3% chance of witnessing it, so don't get your hopes up too high.

As you enter the **Reserva Faunística Península Valdés** (admission US\$12) you'll pass the thin 5km neck of the peninsula. If you're on a tour bus, it will stop at a good interpretation center and lookout. Squint northwards for a glimpse of **Isla de los Pájaros**. This small island inspired Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's description of a hat, or 'boa swallowing an elephant,' in his book *The Little Prince* (from 1929 to 1931 Saint-Exupéry flew as a postal manager in the area). Also, keep an eye out for Argentina's lowest spots, salt flats **Salina Grande** and **Salina Chico** (42m below sea level).

Caleta Valdés is a bay sheltered by a long gravel spit and favored by elephant seals. Just north of here lives a substantial colony of burrowing Magellanic penguins. At **Punta Norte** a mixed group of sea lions and elephant seals snoozes, with the occasional orca pod keeping an eye out offshore. Watch for armadillos in the parking lot here.

Puerto Pirámide – a sunny, sandy, shrubby, one-street kinda town – is home to 300 souls. You can stay here, the peninsula's only sizable settlement, to enjoy a calmer spot and be closer to wildlife attractions. Services, however, are very limited compared to Puerto Madryn (there's one ATM that may or may not work). Scuba diving and area tours are definitely available though. Boat rides (US\$20) outside whale-watching season aren't really worth it unless you adore shorebirds and sea lions, though there's a chance of seeing dolphins.

Buses from Puerto Madryn leave for Puerto Pirámide twice daily in summer (US\$3.25, 1½ hours). Schedules are less frequent in the off-season.

Sleeping & Eating

In summer, call ahead to reserve any of these places. All are located near the main road.

Camping Puerto Pirámides (☎ 495-084; campsites per person US\$1.75) Gravel sites sheltered by shrubs and dunes; beach access available, showers US35¢ extra.

Hostel Bahía Ballenas (☎ 495-050; dm US\$10) The only hostel in town, with huge 18-bed, sex-segregated dorm (no doubles). New, with good kitchen and common area. Bike rentals and tours available.

Casa de la Tia Alicia (☎ 495-046; per person US\$10) Just three basic but comfortable rooms, all with shared outside bathrooms. Rustic.

La Posta (☎ 495-036; www.postapiramides.com.ar; d US\$23) Great for families or groups, with three cute apartments with kitchen. One four-bed apartment costs US\$80; dorms are coming.

Estancia del Sol (☎ 495-007; d US\$31) Good midrange place with comfy rooms and large breakfast area.

Refugio de Luna (☎ 495-083; dm/d US\$16/33) Small place with only 10 beds total; two-level suite available for US\$58. Artsy, natural and relaxing place with beautiful common room.

Among food options, La Estación, across from the YPF gas station, has a nice deck and atmosphere. There are many restaurants by the water, down the first street to the right as you enter town; La Posta, with wood deck out front, is a good inexpensive choice.

TRELEW

☎ 02965 / pop 95,000

Trelew is not an exciting city, but does have a pleasant bustling center with leafy plaza and some historical buildings. There's an excellent dinosaur-oriented museum, and it's a convenient base for exploring the nearby Welsh villages of Gaiman and Dolavon, along with the noisy Punta Tombo penguin reserve. Trelew's major cultural event is late October's **Eisteddfod de Chubut**, celebrating Welsh traditions.

Information

There's a **tourist office** (☎ 420-139; cnr San Martín & Mitre) on the plaza, where many banks with ATMs can be found, along with the **post office** (cnr Av 25 de Mayo & Mitre).

Sights

In the former railway station, the nicely presented **Museo Regional** (cnr Fontana & 9 de Julio; admission US\$0.75; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, 2-8pm Sun) has good Welsh artifacts; check out the glass 'breast' bottle and the hat iron. Nearby is the excellent **Museo Paleontológico Egidio Feruglio** (admission US\$5; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-8pm Sat & Sun) with realistic dinosaur exhibits. Don't miss the 1.7m ammonite.

Tours

Travel agencies organizing tours to Península Valdés (opposite) and Punta Tombo (p150) include **Alcamar Travel** (☎ 421-213; San Martín 146) and **Nievemar** (☎ 434-114; Italia 20). Tours are similarly priced to those from Puerto Madryn. There are also tours to see black-and-white Commerson's dolphins (US\$20, best viewed

September to November). Request English-speaking guides beforehand.

Sleeping

Camping Patagonia (☎ 154-06907; campsites per person US\$2.25) Seven kilometers outside town, off Ruta 7 on the way to Rawson. Green and clean, with shady sites near river.

Residencial Argentino (☎ 436-134; Moreno 93; s/d US\$10/15) Full of funky murals, kitschy decor and plain rooms, the best overlooking the plaza. Near the bus terminal; TV costs US\$1.75 extra.

Residencial Rivadavia (☎ 434-472; hotel_riv@infovia.com.ar; Rivadavia 55; s/d from US\$11/15) The best and priciest rooms are upstairs, where it's brighter; downstairs is the old wing, with bearable rooms.

Hotel Touring Club (☎ 425-790; htouring@speedy.com.ar; Fontana 240; s/d US\$16/26) Has classic old feel, with marble touches and decent small rooms (though inside ones are depressing) with cable TV. Breakfast is served in the atmospheric café downstairs.

Hotel Galicia (☎ 433-802; www.hotelgalicia.com.ar; 9 de Julio 214; s/d from US\$16/29) Decent doubles with carpet and cable TV, but some singles are claustrophobically tiny and windowless.

Eating & Drinking

El Norte supermarket (cnr 9 de Julio & Rivadavia) For cheap takeout.

La Bodeguita (Belgrano 374; mains US\$3.25-10) Modern, popular place big on pizzas, but also does meats, pasta and seafood. Attentive service and family atmosphere.

Confitería Touring Club (Fontana 240; mains US\$4-6.50) Excellent for its old-time atmosphere. Breakfast, sandwiches and alcoholic drinks available.

El Quijote (Belgrano 361; mains 4-7) One word: *parrilla*.

El Viejo Molino (Gales 250; mains US\$5-10) Beautifully renovated old mill, with lofty and artsy interior. Look for the BBQ window grill; also pastas, fancy salads and tango on weekends.

San Javier (San Martín 57) Café, ice-cream parlor and sidewalk tables up front, but bar serving cans of Guinness and Kilkenny in back. Fancy, modern atmosphere.

Getting There & Around

The airport (☎ 433-433) is 6km north of town (taxis US\$3). **Aerolíneas Argentinas** (☎ 420-170; www.aerolineasargentinas.com; 25 de Mayo 33) and **LADE** (☎ 435-740), at the bus station, provide services.

Trelew's bus station is six blocks northeast of downtown. Destinations include Puerto Madryn (US\$2.25, one hour), Gaiman (US\$75¢, 30 minutes), Comodoro Rivadavia (US\$13, five hours), Viedma (US\$17, seven hours), Bariloche (US\$35, 14 hours) and Buenos Aires (US\$45, 20 hours).

Car-rental stands are at the airport and in town; cheapest rentals run about US\$50 with 200km.

AROUND TRELEW

Gaiman

☎ 02965 / pop 5500

For a taste of Wales in Patagonia, head 17km west of Trelew to Gaiman. The streets are calm and wide and the buildings nondescript and low; on hot days the local boys swim in the nearby river. The real reason travelers visit Gaiman, however, is to down pastries at one of several good **Welsh teahouses**. Most open around 3pm and offer unlimited tea and homemade sweets for US\$6.50 (eat a very light lunch). To get oriented visit the **tourist office** (☎ 491-014; www.gaiman.gov.ar; cnr Rivadavia & Belgrano).

The small **Museo Histórico Regional Gales** (admission US\$35¢; ☎ 3-7pm Tue-Sun) details Welsh colonization with old pioneer photographs and household items. Support Joaquín Alonso's eccentricity at **Parque El Desafío** (admission US\$2.25; ☎ dawn-dusk), a garden-forest area methodically strewn with bottles, cans, and even old TV sets.

Gaiman is an easy day trip from Trelew, but if you want to stay try homey **Dyffryn Gwirdd** (☎ 491-777; www.dwhosteria.com.ar; Tello 103; s/d US\$15/21; ☎), with seven simple but good rooms and pleasant atmosphere, or clean and comfortable **Hostería Gwesty Tywi B&B** (☎ 491-292; www.advance.com.ar/usuarios/gwestywi; MD Jones 342; s/d US\$15/23). There's also camping outside the town center (ask at the tourist office).

Frequent buses arrive from Trelew (US\$75¢, 30 minutes).

Reserva Provincial Punta Tombo

From September to April, over a half-million Magellanic penguins breed at Punta Tombo, 115km south of Trelew (1½ hours by road). It's the largest penguin colony outside Antarctica. Other area birds include rheas, cormorants, giant petrels, kelp gulls and

oystercatchers. You may also spy some land critters such as armadillos, foxes and guanacos on the way there.

You can get very close to the birds for photos, but don't try to touch them – they'll nip. To get there, arrange a tour in Trelew or Puerto Madryn (from US\$29 plus US\$6.50 admission) or hire a taxi (US\$59). Car rentals are also a possibility. For more information, see the Puerto Madryn and Trelew sections.

COMODORO RIVADAVIA

☎ 0297 / pop 142,000

Comodoro Rivadavia is popular only as a convenient pit stop along Argentina's long eastern coastline. It's a homely city with busy streets and the ugliest cathedral you'll likely ever see. Founded in 1901, Comodoro boomed a few years later when well-diggers made the country's first major petroleum strike. The state soon dominated the sector through now-privatized YPF (Argentina is self-sufficient in petroleum, with over one-third of it coming from this area). For a neat view hike 212m to the *mirador* atop Cerro Chenque.

Information

Comodoro's other services include banks with ATMs (along San Martín).

Cambio Thaler (Mitre 943)

Chilean consulate (☎ 446-2414; Brown 456, 1st fl).

Information counter At the bus station.

Post office (cnr San Martín & Moreno)

Tourist office (☎ 446-2376; www.comodoro.gov.ar; Rivadavia 430)

Sights

Die-hard petroleum fans head to **Museo del Petróleo** (☎ 455-9558; admission US\$1.75; 🕒 8am-1pm & 3-8pm Tue-Fri, 3-8pm Sat & Sun), which covers the social and historical aspects of petroleum development. Tours available; call ahead. From San Martín, take the 7 Laprida or 8 Palazzo bus (US\$40¢, 10 minutes); get off at La Anónima supermarket.

Sleeping

Comodoro is a transport hub, and hotels can get full later in the day.

Hostería Rua Marina (☎ 446-8777; Belgrano 738; s/d from US\$12/23) The rooms are fine, if small, but are dark and face the indoor hallway. Best are rooms 18, 19 and 20, with outside windows.

Cari-Hue (☎ 447-2946; Belgrano 563; s/d US\$15/28) Seven clean and tidy budget rooms, all with

shared bathroom. The indoor patio is strewn with plants and garden gnomes.

Hotel Victoria (☎ 446-0725; Belgrano 585; s/d US\$25/31; 📺) Larger midrange place with good modern rooms with cable TV.

Also recommended:

Hotel El Español (☎ 446-0116; 9 de Julio 950; s/d US\$8/15) Very simple; upstairs rooms brighter.

25 de Mayo (☎ 447-2350; 25 de Mayo 989; d US\$15) Very basic, with outdoor hall and kitchen access.

Belgrano (☎ 447-8439; Belgrano 546; d US\$29, s/d with shared bathroom US\$12/20) Nice halls and simple homey rooms.

Eating & Drinking

El Norte supermarket (cnr Rivadavia & Pellegrini) Cheap takeout.

Patio de Comidas (cnr Güemes & San Martín; meals under US\$3) Good and cheap.

La Barra (San Martín 686; mains US\$1.75-7.50) Popular café serving pastas, salads and meats, along with plenty of cocktails.

Café del Sol (San Martín 502; snacks US\$2-4) Hip and softly lit café which doubles as a late-night bar. Serves breakfast.

Molly Malone (San Martín 292; mains US\$3-5) Small and funky bar/restaurant with tea, snacks, meals and alcoholic drinks.

La Rastra (Rivadavia 348; mains US\$3.50-9) One of the better *parrillas* in town, and also serves pasta and seafood.

Los Tres Chinos (Rivadavia 341) Modern, large *tenedor libre* for US\$5.25.

Getting There & Around

The **airport** (☎ 454-8093) is 8km east of center (bus US\$40¢). **Aerolíneas Argentinas** (☎ 444-0050; www.aerolineasargentinas.com; 9 de Julio 870) and **LADE** (☎ 447-0585; Rivadavia 360) provide services.

The bus terminal is in the center of town. Destinations include Trelew (US\$13, 5½ hours), Los Antiguos (US\$15, six hours), Esquel (US\$20, nine hours), Bariloche (US\$30, 14 hours), Río Gallegos (US\$22, 11 hours) and Buenos Aires (US\$56, 24 hours). Buses to El Calafate all go through Río Gallegos. Chilean destination include Coyhaique, Chile (US\$23, nine hours, twice weekly) and Puerto Montt (US\$43, 22 hours, three times weekly).

LOS ANTIGUOS

☎ 02963 / pop 2400

Situated on the shores of Lago Buenos Aires, Los Antiguos is a little oasis with rows of poplar trees sheltering *chacras* (farms) of cherries,

strawberries, apples, apricots and peaches. Travelers come to cross the border into Chile, but getting here via RN 40 can be an adventure in itself.

Los Antiguos' **Fiesta de la Cereza** (cherry festival) occurs the first or second weekend in January, and the nearby countryside has good **hiking** and **fishing**. The **tourist office** (☎ 491-261; www.losantiguos.gov.ar; 11 de Julio 446) has transport information. There's one bank with ATM.

Two kilometers east of center lies cypress-sheltered **Camping Municipal** (☎ 491-265; campsites per person US\$75¢, tent US\$1). Windowless, six-bunk log cabins also available (per person US\$6.50). **Hospedaje Padillo** (☎ 491-140; San Martín 44 Sur; dm US\$10) is a friendly, family-run place right where Chaltén Travel buses stop; it has good dorms, one double with bathroom (US\$23) and a nice cooking area. For more comfort try **Hotel Argentino** (☎ 491-132; s/d US\$16/26), which offers decent modern rooms. **Agua Grande** (☎ 491-165; 11 de Julio 871) is the best restaurant in town.

Buses cross the border to Chile Chico (p517) three times daily. From November through March, **Chaltén Travel** (www.chaltentravel.com) goes to El Chaltén on even-numbered days (US\$42, 13 hours). Other destinations include Perito Moreno (US\$3.25, one hour), Río Gallegos (US\$33, 16 hours) and Comodoro Rivadavia (US\$15, seven hours). There are weekly Tacsá buses to both Esquel (US\$45, 10 hours) and El Chaltén (US\$42, 14 hours) though they may be unreliable. The gradual paving of RN 40 and subsequent future services will keep transport options in a flux, so get current information.

EL CHALTÉN

☎ 02962 / pop winter 500, summer 1800

One of Patagonia's premier traveler magnets, this small and homely but fast-growing village is set in a pretty river valley. The reason travelers come are the extraordinary snowcapped towers of the **Fitz Roy range**, offering plenty of world-class hiking and camping along with some of the most stunning mountain scenery you'll ever witness. Climbers from around the world are drawn here for their chance to summit **Cerro Fitz Roy** (3441m), as well as other peaks. Pack for wind, rain and cold temperatures even in summer, when views of the peaks can be obscured. If the sun is out, however, El Chaltén is paradise on earth – but come and see it soon, as the road to El

Calafate is being paved and changes are sure to come.

All water sources in the area are potable, so help keep them clean. Note that El Chaltén is within national park boundaries, and rules regarding fires and cleaning distances from rivers must be followed (park headquarters has details). El Chaltén mostly shuts down from April to October. For more information see www.elchalten.com.

Information

On the left just before the bridge into town, **park headquarters** (☎ 493-004) has maps and hiking information; day buses automatically stop here. You need to register for anything longer than a day hike. To find the **tourist office** (☎ 493011) look for the satellite dish and picket fence after crossing the bridge into town.

Bring enough Argentine pesos for your stay in El Chaltén. There are no banks, ATMs or exchange houses, and the few places that take traveler's checks, credit cards or US dollars offer poor exchange rates. Many travelers have left sooner than they wanted to because they ran out of money.

Locutorios and limited internet access are available; **Rancho Grande Hostel** (☎ 493-005; www.hostelspatagonia.com; San Martín 724) has the best internet connection, but it's not cheap. A decent selection of camping food and supplies is readily available at the small supermarkets in town. Gear like stoves, fuel, sleeping bags, tents and warm clothes can be bought or rented from Camping Center, Eolia and Viento Oeste, all on San Martín (the main drag).

If you need a mountain/climbing/ice-trekking guide, visit **Casa de Guías** (Costanera Sur s/n; www.casadeguias.com.ar); they speak English and also offer rock-climbing classes.

Activities

One popular hike goes to **Laguna Torre** and the base camp for skilled technical climbers attempting the spire of **Cerro Torre** (3128m); it's three hours one way. Another climbs from Camping Madsen to a signed junction, where a side trail leads to backcountry campsites at Laguna Capri. The main trail continues gently to Río Blanco, base camp for the Cerro Fitz Roy climb, and then very steeply to **Laguna de los Tres** (four hours one way). The hike to Laguna Toro is seven hours one way, so most folks camp overnight (register at park

headquarters). You can rent horses in town for some of these hikes.

Sleeping

Prices following are for January and February, when you should arrive with reservations.

Rancho Grande Hostel (☎ 493-005; www.hostelspatagonia.com; San Martín 724; dm/d US\$10/42) El Chaltén's largest hostel, with spacious, modern dorms and common areas. Good services and busy atmosphere. Great doubles, all with bathroom. Takes credit cards and travelers checks; HI discount.

Albergue Patagonia (☎ 493-019; patagoniahostel@yahoo.com; San Martín 493; dm US\$10) Cozy areas, an intimate homey feel and small dorms make for a very friendly stay. Bathrooms can get cramped, however. Bike rentals available; HI discount.

Condor de los Andes (☎ 493-101; www.condordeand.es; cnr Río de las Vueltas & Halvorsen; dm/d US\$10/45) Small hostel with good common spaces and backpacker feel. Each dorm (four to six beds) has its own bathroom. HI discount.

Hospedaje La Base (☎ 493-031; cnr Lago del Desierto & Hensen; dm US\$10) Good spacious rooms with bath, all facing outside and with kitchen access. Rooms 5 and 6 share an inside kitchen with dining area; great for large groups. Video loft in reception area.

Albergue Hem Herhu (☎ 493-224; hugocostacastilla@hotmail.com; Las Loicas s/n; dm US\$10) Unkempt front yard at this small grungy place, but laid-back with spacious dorms. Just 16 beds; two- and four-bed cabañas also available (US\$54/65).

Albergue Los Nires (☎ 493-009; www.elchalten.com/losnires; Lago del Desierto s/n; dm/d US\$10/42) Rather impersonal hotel with cold tiled halls. There are 30 good-sized rooms, some with carpet.

Albergue del Lago (☎ 493-245; eduardomonacochalten@yahoo.com.ar; Lago del Desierto 135; dm US\$10, campsites per person from US\$3.25) Not the best atmosphere, with rather bare dining area and small dorm. Rooms in back are better.

Nothofagus B&B (☎ 493-087; www.elchalten.com/nothofagus; Hensen s/n; s/d from US\$25/26) Seven carpeted, warm and cozy rooms in this charming guesthouse. Friendly, helpful, spotless and family-run; four rooms share two bathrooms. No smoking.

There are two free campsites. Confluencia is smaller and right at the entrance to town. Camping Madsen, at the other end of town, is larger and a bit more private; it's also near the start of the Fitz Roy hike. Both have an

outhouse and potable river water nearby. Campfires are not allowed; do all washing at least 100 steps from the river. El Refugio offers US\$1.30 showers.

Eating & Drinking

Lunchboxes are available at most hostels/hotels and at some restaurants for about US\$5.

Patagonicus (cnr Güemes & Madsen; pizzas US\$3.25-8) Popular pizzería baking 20 kinds of pie.

El Bodegón Cervecería (San Martín s/n; mains US\$3.25-10) Wonderfully cozy pub with creative driftwood decor, good homemade brews and feisty female beer-master. Pizza, pastas and *locro* available.

Fuegia Bistro (San Martín 493; mains US\$4.50-8; ☎ dinner Mon-Sat) Upscale and serving some of the best food in town: lamb in ginger sauce, trout with sage butter and vegetarian crepes.

Ruca Mahuida (Terrey 104; mains US\$5.50-12) Excellent restaurant serving dishes like squash soufflé, salmon ravioli and venison in berry sauce.

Estepa (cnr Cerro Solo & Antonio Rojo; mains US\$6.50-11) Well-prepared and tasty dishes like lamb with Calafate sauce, trout ravioli, spinach crepes and eggplant lasagna. Plenty of pizzas and it also makes lunch boxes.

Getting There & Away

The following schedules are for January and February; during other months services are less frequent or nonexistent. After paving work is done, the travel time to El Calafate will be much shorter.

There are several daily buses to El Calafate (US\$16; 4½ hours). **Chalten Travel** (www.chaltentravel.com) goes to Los Antiguos from mid-November to mid-April, but only on odd-numbered days (US\$54, 13 hours). It also provides transport to Lago del Desierto (US\$12 round-trip, one hour), where it's possible to hike and take a boat into Chile.

EL CALAFATE

☎ 02902 / pop 8000

Fast-growing El Calafate has become a gung-ho Patagonian destination, but despite its touristy facade makes a pleasant-enough pit stop for a few days. Its prime location between El Chaltén and Torres del Paine (Chile) also means that most travelers pass through here at some point or another, and fortunately for them there is one incredible, unmissable

attraction: the dynamic Perito Moreno Glacier, located 80km away in Parque Nacional Los Glaciares (p156).

Information

There are several banks with ATMs in town. Many tour agencies line Av Libertador.

Cambio Thaler (9 de Julio 57) Changes traveler's checks.

La Cueva (☎ 492-417; Moyano 839; 📧 Sep-May) Is a basic mountaineers *refugio* that organizes area treks.

Parques Nacionales (☎ 491-545; Av Libertador 1302) Issues trekking permits, fishing licenses and hiking information.

Post office (Av Libertador 1133)

Tourist office (☎ 491-090; www.elcalafate.gov.ar) At the bus terminal.

Sights & Activities

Within town there's not much to do besides souvenir shopping and people-watching, but a few distractions exist. **Centro de Interpretación Histórica** (☎ 492-799; cnr Brown & Bonarelli; admission US\$4; 🕒 10am-9pm) explains the history of Patagonia via photos, diagrams and a video. It's just north of the center. **Laguna Nimez** (admission US\$75¢; 🕒 9am-9pm Oct-Mar) is a wetlands sanctuary 15 minutes' walk from town. Walk north on Alem, go over the small white bridge and at the *cervecería* (brewery restaurant) jog right, then left. There's also good horse-riding in the area.

Sleeping

In January and February reservations are crucial.

EL CALAFATE

0 300 m
0 0.2 miles

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- Overland Patagonia.....(see 5)

Camping Municipal (☎ 492-622; José Pantín s/n) Woodsy creekside sites with firepits. Being renovated at research time so contact for prices.

Hospedaje Jorgito (☎ 491-323; hjor2@latinmail.com; Moyano 943; campsites per person US\$3.25, r US\$26, with shared bathroom US\$20) Twelve bright, warm and old-fashioned rooms, all in a large family house with kitchen. Pleasant orchard sites.

Los Dos Pinos (☎ 491-271; www.losglaciares.com/losdospinos; 9 de Julio 358; campsites per person US\$3.50, dm/d US\$6.50/42, cabañas US\$80-97) A veritable compound of lodging, hardly personal but there is something for everyone. There is a large kitchen/dining area in separate building. Decent campsites.

Hostel de las Manos (☎ 492-996; www.hosteldelasmanos.com.ar; Feruglio 59; dm US\$8) Small hostel with intimate and bright common area, but tiny dorms with outside lockers. Breakfast extra (US\$1.75). North of center; free pickup from bus station.

Albergue del Glaciar Pioneros (☎ 491-243; www.glaciar.com; Los Pioneros 255; dm US\$8.50, d US\$29-44) Pleasant and modern hostel with small, clean dorms and spacious common areas. Small restaurant on premises. Superior doubles are excellent; HI discount.

Calafate Hostel (☎ 492-450; www.calafatehostels.com; Moyano 1226; dm US\$8-9, d US\$36-42) Huge, beautiful log cabin hostel surrounded by balconies inside and out. A bit impersonal and almost hotel-like (good for large groups). Many services including restaurant; HI discount.

America del Sur (☎ 493-525; www.americahostel.com.ar; Puerto Deseado 151; dm/d US\$10/50) One of Calafate's best lodgings, with wonderfully airy common spaces (and views), spacious modern dorms (each with its own bath) and exceptional service. Clean and tidy, with floor heating.

Hospedaje Sir Thomas (☎ 492-220; www.cotecal.com.ar/hospedajesirthomas; Espora 257; s/d US\$34/39) Fourteen beautiful and tidy rooms with bath. Well-run, friendly and intimate.

Las Cabañitas (☎ 491-118; lascabanitas@cotecal.com.ar; Valentin Feilberg 218; cabañas US\$39-53) Just five small and dark but very cute cabañas, along with one room, are available at this friendly place.

Cabañas Nevis (☎ 493-180; www.cabanasnevis.com.ar; Av Libertador 1696; cabañas US\$80-104) Fourteen cute, two-story A-frame cabins with four to eight beds, kitchen and cable TV, all on a grassy lot. Just outside center; English spoken.

Also recommended:

i Keu Ken (☎ 495-175; www.patagoniaiukeu.com.ar; Pontoriero 171; dm US\$10, d US\$33) Up a hill; cool common areas and good clean dorms. Free pickup.

Albergue del Glaciar Libertador (☎ 491-792; www.glaciar.com; Av Libertador 587; dm/d US\$10/44) Modern large hostel, with all rooms facing a dark, tall inside courtyard. HI discount.

Hospedaje Alejandra (☎ 491-328; Espora 60; d US\$20) Seven small, homey rooms with shared bathrooms in family house.

Hostel Buenos Aires (☎ 491-147; buenosaires@cotecal.com.ar; Buenos Aires 296; dm US\$8, d US\$26-33) Small, dark and mazelike, with tiny kitchen.

Eating

In January and February make reservations at higher-end places.

La Anónima (cnr Av Libertador & Perito Moreno) Cheap takeout.

La Tablita (☎ 491-065; Colonel Rosales 28; mains US\$4.25-6.50; ☎ closed Wed lunch) Very popular for its great *parrillada*, with lots of sides and dessert. Reserve ahead.

Casimiro (☎ 492-590; Libertador 963; mains US\$5-14) Very fancy place with well-prepared dishes of homemade pastas, risotto, lamb stew and grilled trout. Upscale rustic atmosphere and extensive wine list. Also try nearby sister restaurant Biguá.

La Lechuza (Av Libertador 1301; pizzas US\$6.50-10) Large variety of excellent pizzas, along with inexpensive sandwiches, salads and empanadas. Warm brick atmosphere; popular.

Pura Vida (Av Libertador 1876; mains US\$6.50-10; ☎ dinner Thu-Tue) Awesome healthy food and huge portions. Try the gnocchi with saffron rice, rabbit with cream or Patagonian lamb stew. Ten minutes' walk west of center.

Pascasio (☎ 492055; 25 de Mayo 52; mains US\$7-14) One of Calafate's best, serving exotic dishes like hare in wild mushroom sauce, venison loin wrapped in bacon and ñandú with leek pudding.

Also recommended:

La Cocina (Av Libertador 1245; mains US\$3-8; ☎ closed Tue) Intimate, popular place serving excellent pastas.

Rick's (Av Libertador 1091; mains US\$5-10) *Parrillada libre* for US\$9.50, but try the huge à la carte *bife de chorizo* (salad bar included). Mi Viejo, next door, has similar menu but better service.

Vaca Atada (Av Libertador 1176; mains US\$5.25-8; ☎ closed Wed) Small and upscale, with good dishes of fish, pastas and grilled lamb.

Estilo Campo (cnr Gregores & 9 de Julio; lunch US\$6, dinner US\$6.50) All-you-can-eat place with a good range of dishes. Drinks extra.

Drinking

Librobar (Av Libertador 1015) Pocket-sized café-bar with great views over Libertador. Small, friendly and sports a wall of books. Snacks available.

Shackleton Lounge (Av Libertador 3287) Three kilometers from center, but worth it for the good music, strong daiquiris and Shackleton theme. Two levels, with artsy laid-back lounge on top.

Grouse (Av Libertador 351) Celtic pub with cozy ambience, glass ceiling, dart board and Guinness. Occasional live music.

Whirra Microbrewery (Brown 1391; ☎ closed Tue) On the way to Laguna Nimez is this small place serving snacks and local microbrews.

Don Diego de la Noche (Av Libertador 1603) Cozy, long-running place offering live music like tango, guitar and folklore. Also serves dinner, and the bar is open 'til 5am.

Getting There & Around

Book your flight into and out of El Calafate as soon as possible; flights have been booked solid all summer in the past.

The **airport** (☎ 492-230) is 23km east of town; the departure tax is US\$6. **TransPatagonia** (☎ 493-766) has shuttle services for US\$4; taxis cost US\$9. **Aerolíneas Argentinas** (☎ 0870-222-86527; www.aerolineasargentinas.com; 9 de Julio 57) and **LADE** (☎ 491-262), at bus terminal, provide services.

Bus destinations include Río Gallegos (US\$11, five hours), El Chaltén (US\$16, 4½ hours) and Puerto Natales, Chile (US\$16, five hours).

In summer, **Chalten Travel** (www.chaltravel.com; Av Libertador 1174) and **Overland Patagonia** (www.overlandpatagonia; Los Pioneros 255) go from El Calafate to Bariloche via adventurous Ruta 40. Prices range from US\$120 to US\$180.

Car rentals in El Calafate will cost you around US\$52 per day with 200km.

PARQUE NACIONAL LOS GLACIARES

Few glaciers on earth can match the activity and excitement of the blue-hued **Perito Moreno Glacier**. Its 60m jagged ice-peaks sheer off and crash-land with huge splashes and thunderous rifle-cracks, birthing small tidal waves and large bobbing icebergs – while your

neck hairs rise a-tingling. It's the highlight of **Parque Nacional Los Glaciares** (admission US\$10) and measures 30km long, 5km wide and 60m high. What makes this glacier exceptional is that it's constantly advancing – up to 2m per day – while constantly calving icebergs from its face. While most of the world's glaciers are receding, the Perito Moreno Glacier is considered 'stable.' Every once in a while, however, part of its façade advances far enough to reach the Península de Magallanes and dam the Brazo Rico arm of Lago Argentino. This causes tremendous pressure to build up, and after a few years a river cuts through the dam and eventually collapses it – with spectacular results. The last time this happened was in March 2006.

The Perito Moreno Glacier was born to be a tourist attraction. The ideally located Península de Magallanes is close enough to the glacier to provide glorious panoramas, but far enough away to be safe. A long series of catwalks and platforms give everyone a great view. Hanging around for a few hours, just looking at the glacier and awaiting the next great calving, can be an existential experience.

Most tours cost US\$29 for transport, guide and a few hours at the glacier; some 'alternative' tours include a short hike or boat ride for a few more pesos. Practically all hostels and hotels offer tours to their guests. If you don't want a tour, head to El Calafate's bus station; round-trip transport only costs US\$20. Buses leave at 9am and 3pm and return at 4pm and 8pm. Groups can hire a *remise* for about US\$60 (negotiate rates, times and what is included); this gives more flexibility and the option to visit nearby *estancias*. Consider seeing the glacier later in the day, when many of the crowds have gone (afternoon tours are also available).

There are several other kinds of tours, including an all-day boat ride to different glaciers (US\$65) and a fun 'Minitrekking' excursion, which has you in crampons hiking on the glacier (US\$80). **Hielo & Aventura** (☎ 492-205; www.hieloyaventura.com; Av Libertador 935) is a recommended tour agency.

RÍO GALLEGOS

☎ 02966 / pop 88,000

Río Gallegos is certainly not the world cup of tourist destinations. Optimists, however, can point out the city's lively downtown and improving facade: modern buildings are going

up and the boardwalk is being made over. There are some amazingly low tides here (they dip down 14m) and some of the continent's best fly-fishing is nearby. You can even take a tour to see penguins. Still, most travelers stop in this coal-shipping, oil-refining and wool-raising port city just long enough to catch the next bus to El Calafate, Puerto Natales or Ushuaia.

Information

Most banks with ATMs are on or near Av Roca.

Chilean consulate (☎ 422-364; Mariano Moreno 136).

Immigration office (☎ 420-205; Urquiza 144)

Municipal tourist office (☎ 436-920; www.riogallegos.gov.ar; cnr Av Roca & Córdoba)

Post office (cnr Avs Roca & San Martín)

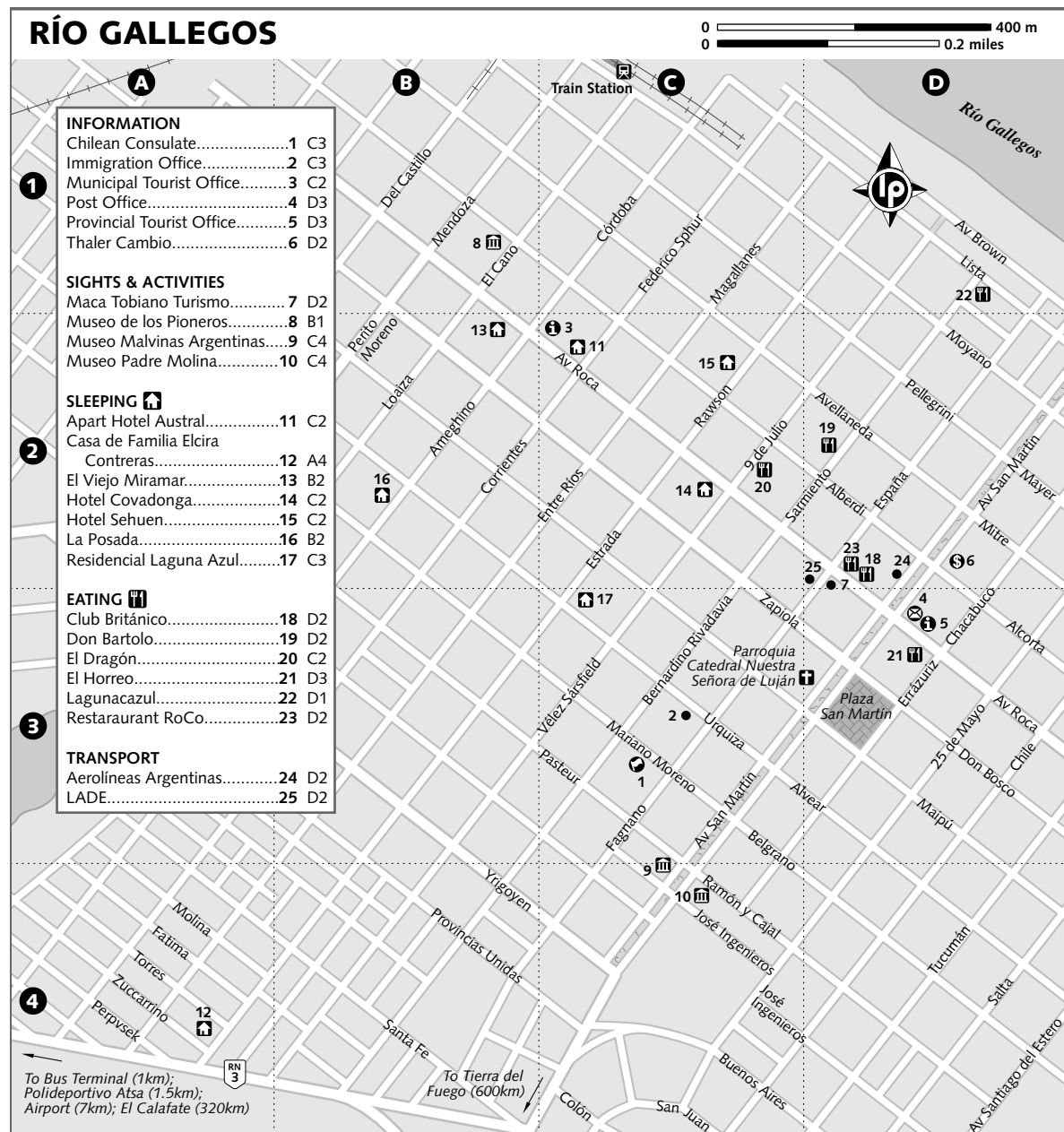
Provincial tourist office (☎ 438-725; Av Roca 863)

Thaler Cambio (cnr Av San Martín & Alcorta)

Tourist office (☎ 442-159) Bus terminal's tourist office.

Sights & Activities

The **Museo Padre Molina** (Ramón y Cajal; admission free; ☎ 10am-7pm Mon-Fri, 11am-7pm Sat & Sun) is an odd combination of dinosaur dioramas and strange modern art. In an 1890s house typical of southern Patagonia nestles the small and scanty **Museo de los Pioneros** (cnr El Cano & Alberdi; admission free; ☎ 10am-7:30pm). Note Saint-Exupéry's photo in the stairway. Get inside a local's head as to why the Malvinas are Argentine at **Museo Malvinas Argentinas** (Pasteur 74; admission free; ☎ 1:30-7pm Mon-Fri).



Tours

Cabo Vírgenes, 140km southeast of Río Gallegos, hosts a large penguin rookery from October to March; **Maca Tobiano Turismo** (☎ 422-466; Roca 998) offers eight-hour excursions for US\$29 (plus US\$2.25 park admission).

Sleeping

Book ahead in summer.

Polideportivo Atsa (☎ 442-310; cnr Asturias & Yugoslavia; campsites per person US\$1.75, tent US\$1.75) Camping sites about 500m southwest of bus terminal.

Casa de Familia Elcira Contreras (☎ 429-856; Zuccarino 431; dm US\$7) Clean and homey dorms have kitchen access. One double available (US\$16). It's far from the center but a 10-minute walk from the bus terminal (taxi US\$1.75).

Residencial Laguna Azul (☎ 422-165; Estrada 298; s/d US\$13/18) Cramped rooms, some with bunks and tiled floors. Ask for bigger rooms.

Hotel Covadonga (☎ 420-190; hotelcovadongargl@hotmail.com; Av Roca 1244; s/d US\$16/25, with shared bathroom US\$11/18; **P**) This is a central old place with a bit of charm and good budget rooms with cable TV.

La Posada (☎ 436445; Ameghino 331; s/d US\$23/26) Good rooms surrounding an internal garden in an attractive older place.

El Viejo Miramar (☎ 430401; Av Roca 1630; s/d US\$23/29) Ten wonderful rooms: clean, carpeted and with cable TV. Friendly and excellent value.

Hotel Sehuen (☎ 425683; www.hotelsehuen.unlugar.com; Rawson 160; s/d US\$23/30; **P**) Serene hotel with a bright lobby and lovely rooms with carpet and cable TV.

Apart Hotel Austral (☎ 434314; www.apartaaustral.com; Av Roca 1505; s/d from US\$26/39) Good small, modern and carpeted rooms with cable TV and many with kitchenette.

Eating

Restaurant RoCo (Av Roca 1157; mains US\$3.25-8) Clean, upscale place with good service, cooking up meats, seafood and pasta.

Don Bartolo (Sarmiento 125; mains US\$3.25-10) Meat and pizzas. Try the *vacio portion* – it's good enough for two.

El Horreo (Av Roca 862; mains US\$4-7.50) Has it all: crepes, omelettes, paella, meats, pastas, seafood and regional specialties. Classic old standby.

Lagunacazul (cnr Lista & Sarmiento; mains US\$4.25-8; ☎ closed Mon) Fresh creations and artsy atmosphere make this Río Gallegos' best restaurant.

Club Británico (Av Roca 935; mains US\$5.25-8) Dark and stuffy, but classic atmosphere for lamb and pastas. Bring your ascot.

El Dragón (9 de Julio 39; buffet US\$6) When you just want to eat it all.

Getting There & Away

Río Gallegos' airport (☎ 442-340) is 7km from center (taxi US\$4). **Aerolíneas Argentinas** (☎ 422-020; www.aerolineasargentinas.com; Av San Martín 545) and **LADE** (☎ 422-316; Fagnano 53) provide services.

The bus terminal is about 2km from the center, on RN 3 (bus 'B' US\$50¢, taxi US\$1.75). Destinations include El Calafate (US\$11, four hours), Ushuaia (US\$29, 12 hours), Comodoro Rivadavia (US\$22, 11 hours), Puerto Madryn (US\$37, 19 hours), Río Grande (US\$21, eight hours), Río Turbio (US\$10, five hours) and Buenos Aires (US\$79, 36 hours). Chilean destinations include Punta Arenas (US\$10, five hours) and Puerto Natales (US\$13, six hours). In high season buy tickets to Punta Arenas one to two days in advance. If buses to Puerto Natales are full, try going via Río Turbio.

TIERRA DEL FUEGO

Reluctantly shared by both Argentina and Chile, this 'land of fire' really is the end of the world. Its faraway location has drawn explorers since the days of Magellan and Darwin, and this tradition continues with today's travelers. A triangular archipelago surrounded by the stormy South Atlantic and the Strait of Magellan, Tierra del Fuego offers plenty of natural beauty: scenic glaciers, lush forests, astounding mountains, clear waterways and a dramatic sea coast. The region's largest city, Ushuaia, is also the 'southernmost city in the world' – a major draw for list-tickers – but has also become the main gateway to wondrous Antarctica. Tierra del Fuego is isolated and hard to reach, but for true adventure-seekers in Argentina it's a must.

Passing ships gave Tierra del Fuego its name: they spotted distant shoreline campfires that the Yámana (or Yahgan) people tended. In 1520 Magellan paid a visit, but it wasn't land he was seeking – it was passage to the Asian spice islands. So as ships sailed by, the indigenous Ona (or Selknam) and Haush continued hunting land animals, while the

Yámana and Alacalufe ('Canoe Indians') lived on seafood and marine mammals. Spain's withdrawal from the continent in the early 1800s, however, brought on European settlement – and the demise of these indigenous peoples.

RÍO GRANDE

☎ 02964 / pop 63,000

Unless you're an avid fisherman, there's no reason to stop for long in Río Grande. With an economy based on sheep and oil, this bleak and windy town has only a couple of decent museums for the traveler. The surrounding countryside, however, offers large sheep *estancias* and some truly fine trout fishing.

Information

There are banks with ATMs at the corner of San Martín & 9 de Julio.

Post office (Rivadavia 968)

Thaler Cambio (Rosales 259)

Tourist office (☎ 431-324; www.riogrande.gov.ar) In the main plaza.

Sights

The **Museo Municipal de la Ciudad** (cnr Alberdi & Belgrano; admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 3-7pm Sat) explains the area's colonization and has surprisingly good exhibits on fauna, indigenous history and local pilots (including Antoine de St Exupéry). The **Museo Salesiano** (☎ 421-642; admission US\$75¢; ☎ 9:30am-noon & 3-7pm Tue-Sun), 10km north of town, has exhibits on geology, natural history and ethnography. Take Bus B from San Martín.

Sleeping

Albergue Hotel Argentino (☎ 422-546; hostelargentino@yahoo.com.ar; San Martín 64; campsites per person US\$3.25, dm/d US\$10/65) The closest thing to a hostel in town. In an old house, with simple dorms, homey kitchen and living room.

Hospedaje Noal (☎ 427-516; Rafael Obligado 557; d US\$23, s/d with shared bathroom US\$10-20) One block from Tecni-Austral is this basic, small, warm place with 10 rooms.

Residencial Rawson (☎ 430-352; Estrada 756; s/d from US\$12/20) Rough around the edges but friendly; offers small OK rooms with TV.

Patagonia Feugo B&B (☎ 433-232; patagoniafeugo bb@hotmail.com; Moyano 788; s/d US\$16/23) Just four rooms (all with shared bathroom) in this plain but clean place with a few homey touches. Kitchen available.

Eating & Drinking

La Nueva Piamontesa (Belgrano 402; ☎ 24hr; mains US\$2-6) Best for takeout, with decent sandwiches, pasta, pizza and *parrillada*. Lots of deli items and its restaurant is next door.

Epa!!! Bar-café (Rosales 445; mains US\$2-6) The hippest spot in town, with colorful booths, futuristic tables and standard dishes.

Café Sonora (Moreno 705; mains US\$3.25-6) Modern and bright corner joint with sandwiches and 30 kinds of pizza.

Galway Irish Bar (Moreno 645) As close to Ireland as you'll get in Río Grande.

Also recommended for cheap takeout:

El Norte supermarket (cnr Belgrano & San Martín)

La Anónima (cnr Belgrano & San Martín)

Getting There & Away

Río Grande's airport (☎ 431-340) is 4km west of town (taxis US\$3). **Aerolíneas Argentinas** (☎ 424-467; www.aerolineasargentinas.com; San Martín 607) and **LADE** (☎ 422-968; Lasserre 445) provide air services.

Río Grande does not have a bus terminal. **Lider** (☎ 420-003; Moreno 635), **Montiel** (☎ 420-997; 25 de Mayo 712) and **Tecni-Austral** (☎ 426-953; Moyano 516) go to Ushuaia daily (US\$10, 3½ hours). Tecni-Austral also has connections to Punta Arenas, Río Gallegos and Comodoro Rivadavia.

USHUAIA

☎ 02901 / pop 61,000

Many different kinds of travelers end up in Ushuaia. There are the independent backpackers, the cruisers, the Antarctica-bound and those who finally end their South American biking, motorcycling or driving journeys here – at the southernmost city in the world. And while the main attraction is indeed simply *being* at the edge of the world, Ushuaia is a pleasant enough destination in itself. Its main street is prime-time touristy, yes, but the city's surrounding landscapes are quite stunning: Ushuaia lies nestled beside the attractive Canal de Beagle (Beagle Channel) and boasts a world-class backdrop of spectacular 1500m Fuegan Andes peaks. There's spectacular hiking, trekking, skiing and boat trips in the area, as well as the chance to go as far south as highways go: RN 3 ends at Bahía Lapataia, in Parque Nacional Tierra del Fuego.

This fast-growing city was originally established as a notorious penal colony. Ushuaia became a key naval base in 1950, and gold,



lumber, wool and fishing brought in revenue over the years. Tourism now drives the city's economy, however, and flights and hotels are full in January and February, when cruise ships arrive almost daily. Even the shoulder months of December and March see crowds and good (though changeable) weather, and with Antarctica becoming hotter every year (both climatically and as a tourist destination), Ushuaia's popularity won't be waning anytime soon.

Information

The internet is everywhere. Several banks in town have ATMs.

Boutique del Libro (25 de Mayo 62) Carries Lonely Planet guides and area maps.

Cambio Thaler (Av San Martín 788) Changes traveler's checks.

Chilean consulate (☎ 430-909; Jainén 50)

Club Andino (☎ 422-335; Juana Fadul 50) Does *not* give out hiking information, but does offer a monthly guided walk and trekking registration (as does the tourist office).

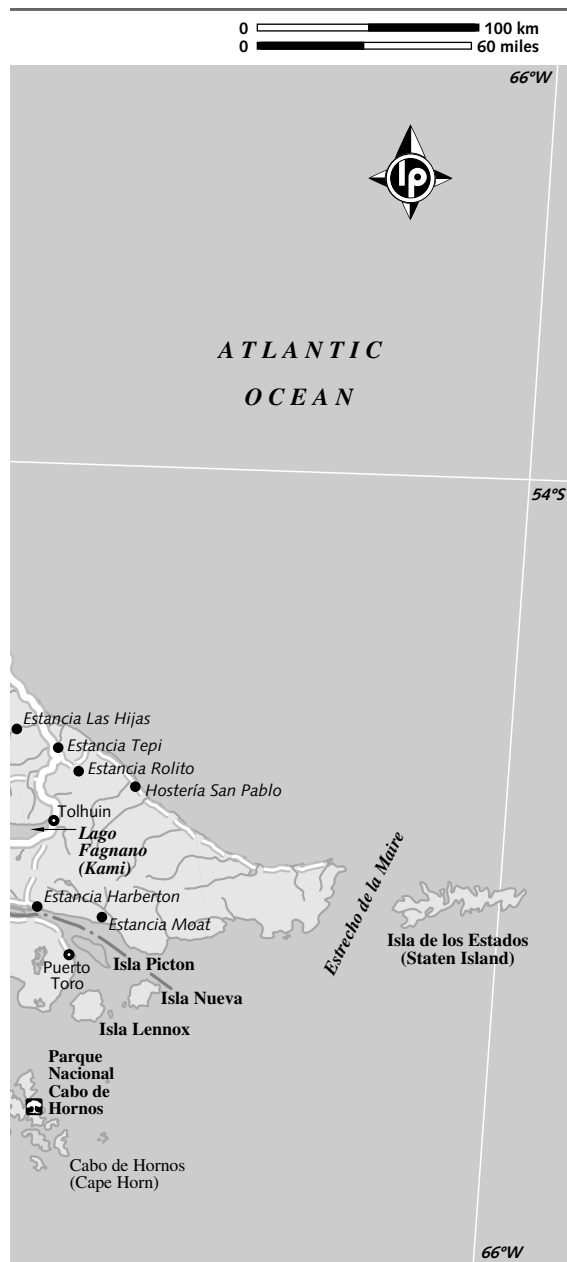
Immigration office (☎ 422-334; Beauvoir 1536)

Municipal tourist office (☎ 424-550; Av San Martín 674) Is informative; it has a branch at the base of the pier.

National Parks Administration (☎ 421-315; Av San Martín 1395).

Sights & Activities

The small but good **Museo del Fin del Mundo** (Av Maipú 179; admission US\$3.25; ☎ 9am-8pm summer) explains Ushuaia's indigenous and natural histories; check out the bone harpoons,



elephant-seal skulls and a surprised stuffed beaver in the gift shop. The excellent **Museos Marítimo & Presidio** (cnr Yaganes & Gobernador Paz; admission for both US\$8; ☎ 9am-8pm) are both in the same building, which held up to 700 inmates in 380 small jail cells. There are also various exhibits, including ones on expeditions to Antarctica. A daily English tour is given at 10am. Tiny **Museo Yámana** (Rivadavia 56; admission US\$2.75; ☎ 10am-9pm summer) has some history on the area's original folk.

After seeing the Perito Moreno Glacier in El Calafate, the **Glaciar Martial** here will seem like an overgrown ice-cube – but at least it's located in a beautiful valley with great views of Ushuaia and the Beagle Channel. Walk or taxi (US\$3.25) to a short chairlift 7km northwest

of town; from here it's about two hours up to the glacier (shorter if you take the chairlift, US\$5 round-trip).

Hop on a **boat tour** to *estancias*, a lighthouse, Puerto Williams, bird island and sea-lion or penguin colonies (penguins waddle October through March). Ask about the size of the boat (small boats mean small groups that get closer to wildlife), whether there are bilingual guides and if there are any landings. Tours range from US\$25 to US\$50; buy tickets at the pier or from your hotel.

Hiking and trekking opportunities aren't limited to the national park: the entire mountain range behind Ushuaia, with its lakes and rivers, is an outdoor person's wonderland. Many trails are poorly marked, however, so hire a guide from **Compañía de Guías** (☎ 437-753; www.companiadeguias.com.ar; Campos 795) – which has guides for mountaineering, ice/rock climbing, kayaking, sailing and fishing (it also organizes expeditions) – or ask for details at the tourist office.

Plenty of ski resorts dot the nearby mountains, with both downhill and cross-country options. The largest resort is **Cerro Castor** (☎ 499-301; www.cerrocator.com), 27km from Ushuaia, with almost 20 slopes. Another large area is Altos del Valle, 19km from town, known for breeding Siberian Huskies – you can get pulled in dog sleds here. Ski-rental equipment is available at each resort, and shuttles run several times daily from town. Ski season runs June to October.

Tours

Many travel agencies sell tours around the region; you can go horse-riding, visit Lagos Escondido and Fagnano, spy on birds and beavers, and even get pulled by husky-dog sleds (winter only). Award-winning tour agency **Canal** (☎ 437-395; www.canalfun.com; Rivadavia 82) organizes adventure tours, but it's not cheap.

Courses

Learn Spanish at **Finis Terrae Spanish School** (☎ 433-871; www.spanishpatagonia.com; cnr Triunvirato & Magallanes). One- to six-week courses available, along with private classes; see website for prices. Also helps with accommodation.

Sleeping

Again, if you're coming in summer – reserve ahead!

USHUAIA

0 700 m
0 0.4 miles

To Altos del Valle (18km); Cerro Castor (26km)

To Lago Escondido (60km); Lago Fagnano (100km)

To Los Comoranes (450m)

To Camping La Pista del Andino (3km); Glaciar Martial (7km)

To Airport (4km); Parque Nacional Tierra del Fuego (12km)

<p>INFORMATION</p> <p>Antarctica Tourist Office... (see 9)</p> <p>Boutique del Libro.....1 C3</p> <p>Cambio Thaler.....2 C3</p> <p>Canal.....3 D2</p> <p>Chilean Consulate.....4 A4</p> <p>Club Andino.....5 C3</p> <p>Immigration Office.....6 A3</p> <p>Municipal Tourist Office.....7 C3</p> <p>National Parks</p> <p>Administration.....8 B3</p> <p>Tourist Information.....9 D3</p> <p>SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES</p> <p>All Patagonia.....10 C3</p> <p>Boat tour companies.....11 D3</p> <p>Compañía de Guías.....12 C2</p> <p>Finis Terrae Spanish School...13 C2</p> <p>Museo del Fin del Mundo...14 D2</p> <p>Museo Yámana.....15 D3</p> <p>Museos Marítimo & Presidio.....16 D2</p> <p>Rumbo Sur.....17 D3</p>	<p>SLEEPING 🏠</p> <p>Amanecer de la Bahía.....18 C2</p> <p>Antarctica Hostel.....19 D2</p> <p>Casa de Familia Zaprucki...20 D2</p> <p>Cruz del Sur.....21 C3</p> <p>El Refugio del Mochilero...22 C2</p> <p>Freestyle.....23 C2</p> <p>Hostal Las Calafates.....24 B2</p> <p>Hostal Malvinas.....25 C2</p> <p>Hostal Río Ona.....26 D2</p> <p>Nido de Condores.....27 C2</p> <p>Patagonia País.....28 D1</p> <p>Posada Costa Serena.....29 D2</p> <p>Pueblo Viejo.....30 D2</p> <p>Torre al Sur.....31 B3</p> <p>Yakush.....32 B3</p>	<p>DRINKING 🍷</p> <p>Dublin Irish Pub.....43 C3</p> <p>Galway Irish Bar.....44 C3</p> <p>Saint Christopher Resto-bar.....45 C3</p> <p>EATING 🍴</p> <p>Bodegón Fueguino.....33 C3</p> <p>Café-bar Tante Sara.....34 C3</p> <p>El Turco.....35 B3</p> <p>Kaupé.....36 C2</p> <p>La Anónima.....37 D2</p> <p>La Cantina Fueguina de Freddy.....38 D3</p> <p>La Estancia.....39 D2</p> <p>La Rueda.....40 D2</p> <p>Lomitos Martinica.....41 D2</p> <p>Tía Elvira.....42 D3</p> <p>TRANSPORT</p> <p>Aerolíneas Argentinas.....46 D2</p> <p>Buses to Parque Nacional Tierra del Fuego.....47 C3</p> <p>LADE.....48 C3</p> <p>Lider.....49 C2</p> <p>Montiel.....50 D2</p> <p>Tecni-Austral (Tolkar travel agency).....51 D2</p>
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Camping La Pista del Andino (☎ 435-890; www.lapistadelandino.com.ar; Alem 2873; camping/RV sites per person US\$3; 📅 Oct-Apr) Some 3km from the center, this pleasant camping spot offers grassy or forest sites with views. There are cooking facilities, good common areas and bikes for rent. Call for free pickup (taxis to the center US\$2).

Torre al Sur (☎ 430-745; www.torrealsur.com.ar; Gobernador Paz 1437; dm with/without HI card US\$6.50/7.50, d US\$15) Friendly hostel with intimate spaces, mazelike halls and rickety, small dorm rooms which can get noisy. Some rooms have great views; doubles have bunks.

Los Cormoranes (☎ 423-459; www.loscormoranes.com; Kamshen 788; dm with/without HI card US\$6.50/8, d US\$29/36; 🏠) Ten minutes' uphill walk, this good hostel has good six- and eight-bed dorms facing

outdoor plank hallways. The best double is room 10; free pickup from airport.

Amanecer de la Bahía (☎ 424-405; www.ushuaiahos.tel.com.ar; Magallanes 594; dm/d US\$7.50/26; 🏠) A bit of a walk uphill lies this decent, friendly hostel, complete with homey eating area and small but good dorms. All doubles share bathroom; resident basset hound.

Cruz del Sur (☎ 434-099; www.xdelsur.com.ar; Deloquí 636; dm/d US\$8/16; 🏠) Casual, laid-back hostel with small four- to eight-bed dorms (some with partial view). Lots of photos and postcards on the walls; pleasant library room. One double.

Antarctica Hostel (☎ 435-774; www.antarctichostel.com; Antártida Argentina 270; dm/d US\$8/29; 🏠) Good, popular hostel with relaxing front lounge,

grassy backyard, loft dining area, underfloor heating and *buena onda* (good vibes). Doubles share bathroom.

Freestyle (☎ 432-874; www.ushuaiafreestyle.com; Gobernador Paz 866; dm/d/apt US\$10/45/58; 📶) Ushuaia's slick five-star hostel, boasting fine spacious dorms (all with view) and beautiful doubles with bathroom and kitchenette. The top-floor lounge comes with banks of windows on both sides (awesome mountain and water views), faux-leather sofas and pool table.

Hostal Los Calafates (☎ 435-515; loscalafates@hotmail.com; Fagnano 456; s/d/t US\$23/29/36) Just seven homey and warm rooms (all with private bathroom) at this clean, friendly, family-run guesthouse.

Posada Costa Serena (☎ 437-212; www.posadacosta-serena.com.ar; Roca 129; s/d US\$36/42, with shared bathroom US\$26/31; 📶) Very central, this friendly and homey guesthouse comes with eight warm rooms, spotless bathrooms and free pastries all day. There's a great kitchen and some rooms have views. Apartment available downstairs.

Casa de Familia Zaprucci (☎ 421-316; Deloquí 271; apt US\$39-98) This little Eden is run by an elderly couple and has four clean, just-like-home apartments (three with kitchen) that hold up to six; one comes with three bedrooms. Pretty garden, cable TV and very comfortable and private.

Also recommended:

El Refugio del Mochilero (☎ 436-129; www.refugiodelmochilero.netfirms.com; 25 de Mayo 231; dm/d US\$8/29; 📶) Small, dark dorms; get one upstairs. Dining area being remodeled.

Patagonia Pais (☎ 431886; www.hostelpatagoniapais.com.ar; Alem 152; dm US\$8; 📶) A walk from center, with mostly good dorms (24 beds total).

Yakush (☎ 435-807; www.hostelyakush.com.ar; Piedrabuena 118; dm/d US\$9/33) Colorful hostel with large, good dorms, awesome upstairs lounging room and attractive kitchen/dining area.

Pueblo Viejo (☎ 432-098; www.puebloviejo.info; Deloquí 242; s/d US\$26/33; 📶) Small, clean and tidy rooms, all of which share bathrooms. But it's friendly, and a good, intimate choice.

Hostal Río Ona (☎ 421-327; www.rioona.com.ar; Magallanes 196; s/d US\$29/36) Ten comfortable rooms, all with private bathroom and most with kitchenette.

Hostal Malvinas (☎ 422-626; www.hostalmalvinas.net; Deloquí 615; s/d/tr US\$47/57/66) Sixteen well-decorated, comfortable rooms, all with private bathroom, fridge, cable TV. Tea/coffee all day.

Eating

La Anónima (cnr Gobernador Paz & Rivadavia) For cheap takeout.

Lomitos Martinica (Av San Martín 68; mains under US\$4.25) Excellent, cheap *parrillada*, huge sandwiches and no-nonsense service.

Café-bar Tante Sara (Av San Martín 701; mains US\$3-5.50) Popular corner bistro with some classic atmosphere. Has it all: breakfast, burgers, sandwiches, salads, snacks and tapas.

El Turco (Av San Martín 1040; mains US\$3.50-6.50; 📶 closed Sun lunch) Not very central, but popular for its cheap meats, pizza and pasta.

Bodegón Fueguino (Av San Martín 859; mains US\$4-8; 📶 closed Mon) Locally recommended eatery with homemade pastas, 12 kinds of *cordero* (lamb) and *calafate* berry ice cream. In cute yellow house.

La Cantina Fueguina de Freddy (Av San Martín 326; mains US\$6.50-12) Good food including pizza, pastas, stews and seafood. Check out the crab tank.

Tía Elvira (Av Maipú 349; mains US\$6.50-20) Pricey but excellent seafood joint, with plenty of meat and fine wine choices.

Kaupé (☎ 422-704; Roca 470; mains US\$7.50-12; 📶 closed Sun lunch) Ushuaia's high cuisine, with exceptional international dishes such as chicken Bengali and parchment-baked sea bass. Romantic, with great views; reservations are recommended.

La Rueda (Av San Martín 193; dinner buffet US\$9) Good *tenedor libre* with tasty *parrillada* cooked up at the huge grill in the window.

Nearby **La Estancia** (Av San Martín 253) is similar.

Drinking

Note that the southernmost bar in the world isn't in Ushuaia, but on a Ukrainian research station in Antarctica. Sorry.

Galway Irish Bar (Lasserre 108) Large drinking hole with semiauthentic pub decor, dart board and Beagle beer (Ushuaia's beer) on tap. Wide variety of music, with some DJ nights.

Dublin Irish Pub (9 de Julio 168) Intimate, smoky place with good atmosphere and dim lighting. Popular with foreigners, who down bottles of Guinness.

Saint Christopher Resto-bar (Av Maipú 822) This boat-shaped restaurant, complete with nautical theme, serves food during the day but becomes more of a drinking spot at night. Note the rusty hulking shipwreck just offshore.

Getting There & Around

In January and February it's a good idea to book your passage into and out of Ushuaia as early as possible or you might end up waiting

days for a seat – this counts for both buses and airplanes.

Ushuaia's airport is 4km south of center (taxi US\$3); the departure tax is US\$6.50. **Aerolíneas Argentinas** (☎ 0810-222-86527; www.aerolineasargentinas.com; Roca 116), **LADE** (☎ 421-123; Av San Martín 542) and (Chilean) **Aerovías DAP** (www.dap.cl) provide services.

Ushuaia does not have a bus terminal. **Tecni-Austral** (☎ 431-412; Roca 157) has almost-daily

service to Río Grande (US\$10, 3½ hours), Río Gallegos (US\$31, 13 hours) and Comodoro Rivadavia (US\$49, 24 hours), and heads to Punta Arenas three times per week (US\$29, 13 hours). It's based out of the Tolkar travel agency. **Lider** (☎ 436-421; Gobernador Paz 921) and **Montiel** (☎ 421-366; Deloqui 110) go to Río Grande up to eight times daily (US\$10, 3½ hours).

Taxis around town are cheap. Many bus companies go to Lagos Escondido/Fagnano

BEYOND THE EDGE OF THE WORLD – ANTARCTICA

A trip to awe-inspiring Antarctica is a once-in-a-lifetime adventure. It's expensive but worth every penny, and is so much more than just a continent to tick off your list. The land and ice shelves pile up hundreds of meters thick with kilometers of undulating, untouched snow, while countless glaciers flow down mountainsides. Icebergs get as big as tall buildings and come in shapes you didn't think were possible, from triangles to dragon-silhouettes to graceful sculptures with circular arches. The wildlife is magnificent; you'll see thousands of curious penguins and a wide variety of flying birds, seals and whales. Antarctica is an astounding place, and its tourism industry is growing fast as more and more people visit. We can only hope that careful management will assure that this glorious continent remains beautiful.

For the average person, cruising is the easiest and best way visit the White Continent. The season runs from mid-November to mid-March; peak voyages often get sold out. Last-minute tickets might be available later in the season, but will still cost around US\$3000. Regular tickets run from around US\$4000 on up, depending on the company. Ask how many days you will actually spend in Antarctica, as crossing the Southern Ocean takes up to two days each way. And how many landings will there be? The smaller the ship, the more landings per passenger (always depending on the weather, of course).

Because of its relatively close location to the Antarctic peninsula, most cruises leave from Ushuaia. Travel agencies such as **Rumbo Sur** (☎ 422-275; www.rumbosur.com.ar; Av San Martín 350), **All Patagonia** (☎ 433-622; www.allpatagonia.com; Juana Fadul 60) and **Canal** (☎ 437-395; www.canalfun.com; Rivadavia 82) offer packages, though there are many more. **Alicia Petiet** (aliciapetiet@hotmail.com) is a tour consultant who helps travelers with Antarctic cruises.

Check that your company is a member of **IAATO** (www.iaato.org), whose members must abide by strict guidelines for responsible travel to Antarctica. Following are just a few companies that go to Antarctica.

Adventure Associates (www.adventureassociates.com) Australia's first tour company to Antarctica, with many ships and destinations.

Clipper Cruise Line (www.clippercruise.com) Longer voyages on a 122-passenger ship that include the Falklands and South Georgia Islands.

Gap Adventures (www.gap.ca) Highly recommended new company with affordable trips, excellent service and ecological bent.

Heritage Expeditions (www.heritage-expeditions.com) Award-winning New Zealand company that also goes to Ross Sea/East Antarctica regions.

Peregrine Adventures (www.peregrineadventures.com) Offers unique trips that include visiting the Antarctic Circle, with kayaking and camping options.

Quark Expeditions (www.quarkexpeditions.com) Three kinds of ships, from an icebreaker to a 48-passenger small ship for close-knit groups.

WildWings Travel (www.wildwings.co.uk) UK-based company that focuses on birds and wildlife in Antarctica.

For more information see Lonely Planet's *Antarctica* guidebook. In Ushuaia there's an **Antarctica tourist office** (☎ 421-423; antartida@tierradelfuego.org.ar) at Ushuaia's pier. And one last thing: bring more film and/or extra memory cards than you think you'll need. You'll thank us later.

for US\$20 return. For transport to Parque Nacional Tierra del Fuego, see the following section.

PARQUE NACIONAL TIERRA DEL FUEGO

West of Ushuaia by 12km lies the beautiful **Parque Nacional Tierra del Fuego** (admission US\$6.50), which extends from the Beagle Channel in the south to beyond Lago Fagnano in the north; only a small part of the park is accessible to the public, however. Despite a tiny system of short, easy trails more suited to day-trippers than backpacking trekkers, the views along the bays, rivers and forests are wonderfully scenic. Southern beeches like the evergreen *coihue* and deciduous *lenga* thrive on heavy coastal rainfall, and in autumn the hillsides of deciduous *ñire* burst out in red.

Plenty of bird life graces the coasts here. Keep your eyes peeled for *cauquén* (upland geese), cormorants, oystercatchers, grebes, steamer ducks and even rare condors or albatross. The most common land critters you'll see are the European rabbit and North American beaver, introduced species that have wreaked havoc on the ecosystem. Foxes and the occasional guanaco may also be seen, and marine mammals are most common on offshore islands.

One good, moderate hike runs 6.5km along the north shores of Ensenada Zaratiegui and Bahía Lapataia; it starts at the boat pier. For a longer hike, you can continue along the road, past the Lago Roca campground, to the start of the Lago Roca trail, which goes for 5km to the Chilean border (best not to cross it). About 1.5km into this trail a side trail to the right leads to steep Cerro Guanaco, with decent views (side trail 3km). Taking the bus all the way to the end of RN 3 gives you access to some short scenic walks. For the complete picture, get a map of the area from the tourist office or National Parks Administration in Ushuaia.

Park admission is collected between 8am and 8pm daily October through April. Weather can be very changeable, even in summer, so come prepared.

Sleeping

The only organized campground is **Lago Roca** (☎ 2901-433313; 📅 Oct-Apr). Pitch a tent for US\$2.75 to US\$4 per person; a *confitería* and tiny grocery are nearby. Free campsites in the park include Las Bandurrias, Laguna

Verde and Los Cauquenes, Ensenada and Río Pipo.

Getting There & Away

Minibuses to the park charge US\$3.25 to US\$5 (depending on destination). They leave about every half-hour from 8am to 8pm daily, from the corner of Av Maipú and 25 de Mayo. For a complete list of bus companies, see the tourist office.

If you've got money to burn, take **El Tren del Fin del Mundo** (☎ 2901-431600; www.trendelfindelmundo.com.ar) to the park. The one-hour, scenic, narrow-gauge train ride comes with historical explanations in English and Spanish (US\$18 return, not including park admission). The station is 8km from Ushuaia (taxis US\$5 one way; bus US\$5 return) and there are several departures daily in summer. Reserve in January and February, when cruise-ship tours take over.

ARGENTINA DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATIONS

There's an excellent range of affordable hostels throughout Argentina, including those affiliated with Hostelling International (HI). Most are friendly and offer tours and services. All include kitchen access and sheets; most have towel rental, internet access, luggage storage, light breakfast and double rooms (book these ahead). Typical prices for dorm rooms range from US\$6.50 to US\$9, while doubles can be up to US\$25. For information on two excellent hostel organizations see www.hostels.org.ar (HI) or www.argentinahostels.com (Argentina Hostel Club). You can obtain an HI card in Buenos Aires (see p60).

Residenciales are small hotels, while *hospedajes* are usually family homes with extra bedrooms and shared bathrooms. Hotels can range from one to five stars, and usually come with private bathroom and a light breakfast (coffee, tea and bread or croissants with jam). Some hotels in Buenos Aires and other tourist destinations operate on a two-tier system, charging foreigners more than residents. As far as we know, the accommodations we've listed here don't use this system.

Camping is cheap (around US\$3 per person) and popular in Argentina, though sites aren't always near the center of town. National parks usually have organized sites, and some offer distant *refugios* (basic shelters for trekkers).

Peak tourist months in Buenos Aires are July, August and November to January, when accommodation prices are at their highest. Patagonia is busiest during the summer (November to February) though ski resort towns fill up fast in July and August. Northern destinations and the Atlantic beach towns attract the most travelers in December and January (the latter are practically ghost towns the rest of the year). In peak season it's important to make reservations ahead of time.

We've listed general high-season rates here, but not ultrapeak rates (Easter week or Christmas). In low season, or if you're staying for more than a few days, you can always try asking for a discount.

ACTIVITIES

Argentina has plenty for the adventure-seeking traveler. A multitude of beautiful national parks offer awesome summer hiking and trekking, especially around Bariloche (p136) and Patagonia's Fitz Roy range (p152). For the highest peak outside Asia there's lofty Aconcagua, at 6960m (p127).

Skiing is world-class, with major resorts at Cerro Catedral (Bariloche, p139), Las Leñas (Malargüe, p129), Los Penitentes (p127) and Chapelco (San Martín de los Andes, p133). The ski season runs about mid-June to mid-October. In summer, these mountains turn into activity centers for mountain biking.

Cycling is a popular activity in Mendoza, the Andean northwest, the Lake District and Patagonia (where winds are fierce!). Mountain bikes are best for pedaling the sometimes remote and bad roads, many of which are gravel. Many tourist cities have bike rentals, though quality is not up to Western standards.

The Lake District and Patagonia have some of the world's best fly-fishing, with introduced trout and landlocked Atlantic salmon reaching epic proportions. The season in these areas runs from November to mid-April; it's almost always catch-and-release.

White-water rafting can be enjoyed near Mendoza (as well as in the Lake District) and horse-riding and paragliding are popular in many tourist areas.

BOOKS

Lonely Planet's *Argentina* guidebook, *Buenos Aires* city guide and *Best of Buenos Aires* are *número uno* for exploring Argentina in greater depth.

Travelogues on the country include *The Voyage of the Beagle* (Darwin on gaucho life), *The Uttermost Part of the Earth* (Lucas Bridges on Tierra del Fuego's indigenous folk), *In Patagonia* (Bruce Chatwin's classic) and *The Motorcycle Diaries: A Journey Around South America* (Che Guevara on adventurous travel with a dilapidated motorcycle).

WH Hudson's *Idle Days in Patagonia* tells of the naturalist's adventures in search of the region's fauna; see also his *Tales of the Pampas*, a compendium of short stories. Mountaineers should check out Gregory Crouch's *Enduring Patagonia*, a detailed account of his Cerro Torre climb. Richard W Slatta's *Gauchos and the Vanishing Frontier* depicts the engaging frontier life of Argentina's favorite icon.

Ronald Dworkin's *Nunca Mas: The Report of the Argentine National Commission on the Disappeared* details queasy personal accounts of victims in Argentina's Dirty War (beware – holds back no punches). *The Argentina Reader*, edited by Gabriella Nouzeilles and Graciela R Montaldo, is a gripping collection of readings from historical figures to minority groups to modern culture.

For the capital there's Jason Wilson's quirky *Buenos Aires: A Cultural and Literary Companion*. For something fun pick up a copy of Miranda Frances' timeless *Bad Times in Buenos Aires*, or Marina Palmer's sexy *Kiss and Tango*.

BUSINESS HOURS

Traditionally, businesses open by 9am, break at 1pm for lunch and then reopen at 4pm until 8pm or 9pm. This pattern is still common in the provinces, but government offices and many businesses in Buenos Aires have adopted the 9am to 6pm schedule.

Restaurants generally open noon to 3pm for lunch and 8pm to midnight for dinner. On weekends hours can be longer. Cafés are open all day long; most bars tend to open late, around 9 or 10pm. For tourist office hours see p172.

Opening hours aren't listed in reviews unless they vary widely from these standards.

CLIMATE

January and February are oppressively hot and humid in the subtropical north (including Iguazú Falls) and Buenos Aires. These are the best months, however, to visit the high Andes and southern Patagonia – and you'll still need

warm clothes. Buenos Aires is best in spring or fall. Skiers enjoy the Andes during the winter months, June to September. For more information and climate charts see p1062.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Don't let anyone tell you otherwise: despite the public's constant dissatisfaction with its government and a lumbering economy that gives rise to occasional crime waves, Argentina remains one of the safest countries in Latin America. Most tourists who visit Buenos Aires leave happy and unscathed. Outside the big cities, serious crime is rare.

In general, the biggest dangers in Argentina are speeding cars and buses: be careful crossing streets, and *never* assume you have the right of way as a pedestrian. If you're sensitive to cigarette smoke, be aware that Argentines are truly addicted to nicotine: they'll light up in banks, post offices, restaurants, cafés and everywhere else. Other small concerns include air pollution (in big cities), cracked sidewalks, ubiquitous dog piles and the occasional hole in the ground. Stray dogs are common, but usually don't bite.

For big-city advice, see Buenos Aires (p50). For general advice on traveling safely, see the South America Directory (above).

DRIVER'S LICENSE

To rent a car in Argentina you must be 21 years old and have a valid driver's license and an International Driving Permit. Most rental agencies require a credit card as well. If driving an Argentine car you must carry a *tarjeta verde* (green card); make sure you get one if renting. Foreign vehicles can use their customs permission instead.

ELECTRICITY

Argentina's electric current operates on 220V, 50Hz. Most plugs are either two rounded prongs (as in Europe) or three angled flat prongs (as in Australia).

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

For visa information see Visas, p172.

Embassies & Consulates in Argentina

The following is not a complete list. For locations of these and other consulates see individual city maps.

Australia (Map pp56-7; ☎ 011-4777-6580; Villanueva 1400, Buenos Aires)

Bolivia Buenos Aires (Map pp52-3; ☎ 011-4381-0539; Adolfo Alsina 1886; La Quiaca (☎ 03885-42-2283; cnr San Juan & Árabe Siria); Salta (Map pp106-7; ☎ 0387-421-1040; Mariano Boedo 34); San Salvador de Jujuy (Map p109; ☎ 0388-424-0501; Independencia 1098)

Brazil Buenos Aires (Map pp52-3; ☎ 011-4515-6500; Carlos Pellegrini 1363, 5th fl); Paso de Los Libres (☎ 03772-425-444; Mitre 842); Puerto Iguazú (Map p89; ☎ 03757-421348; Av Guaraní 70)

Canada (Map pp56-7; ☎ 011-4808-1000; Tagle 2828, Buenos Aires)

Chile Bariloche (Map p137; ☎ 02944-422-842; Av Juan Manuel de Rosas 180); Buenos Aires (Map pp52-3; ☎ 011-4327-1762; San Martín 439, 9th fl); Comodoro Rivadavia (☎ 0297-446-2414; Brown 456, 1st fl); Mendoza (Map pp124-5; ☎ 0261-425-4844; Paso de los Andes 1147); Neuquén (☎ 0299-442-2727; La Rioja 241); Río Gallegos (Map p157; ☎ 02966-422-364; Mariano Moreno 136); Salta (Map pp106-7; ☎ 0387-431-1857; Santiago del Estero 965); Ushuaia (Map p162; ☎ 02901-430-909; Jainén 50)

France (Map pp52-3; ☎ 011-4312-2409; Av Santa Fe 846, 4th fl, Buenos Aires)

Germany (Map pp56-7; ☎ 011-4778-2500; Villanueva 1055, Buenos Aires)

Israel (Map pp52-3; ☎ 011-4338-2500; Av de Mayo 701, 10th fl, Buenos Aires)

Italy (Map pp52-3; ☎ 011-4816-6132; Marcelo T de Alvear 1149, Buenos Aires)

Netherlands (Map pp52-3; ☎ 011-4338-0050; Olga Cossetini 831, 3rd fl, Buenos Aires)

New Zealand (Map pp52-3; ☎ 011-4328-0634; Carlos Pellegrini 1427, 5th fl, Buenos Aires)

Norway (Map pp52-3; ☎ 011-4312-2204; Esmeralda 909, 3rd fl B, Buenos Aires)

Paraguay Buenos Aires (Map pp52-3; ☎ 011-4814-4803; Viamonte 1851); Posadas (Map p87; ☎ 03752-423-858; San Lorenzo 179)

Peru (Map pp52-3; ☎ 011-4334-0970; Av Florida 165, Buenos Aires)

South Africa (Map pp52-3; ☎ 011-4317-2900; Marcelo T de Alvear 590, 7th fl, Buenos Aires)

Spain (Map pp52-3; ☎ 011-4811-0070; Guido 1760, Buenos Aires)

Sweden (Map pp52-3; ☎ 011-4342-1422; Tacuari 147, Buenos Aires)

Switzerland (Map pp52-3; ☎ 011-4311-6491; Av Santa Fe 846, 10th fl, Buenos Aires)

UK (Map pp52-3; ☎ 011-4803-7070; Dr Luis Agote 2412, Buenos Aires)

Uruguay Buenos Aires (Map pp52-3; ☎ 011-4807-3040; Av Gral Las Heras 1915); Gualeguaychú (☎ 03446-426-168; Rivadavia 510)

USA (Map pp56-7; ☎ 011-5777-4533; Colombia 4300, Buenos Aires)

Argentine Embassies & Consulates Abroad

Argentina probably has an embassy or consulate in your country; this is only a partial list.

Australia (☎ 02-6273-9111; www.argentina.org.au/index.htm; Level 2, 7 National Cct, Barton, Canberra, ACT 2600)

Canada (☎ 613-236-2351; www.consargenmtl.com; Suite 700, 81 Metcalfe St, Ottawa, Ontario K1P 6K7)

France (☎ 01-45-53-33-00; 6 rue Cimarosa, Paris 75116)

Germany (☎ 0228-249-62-88; Robert-Koch-Str. 104, Venusberg, 53127 Bonn)

New Zealand (☎ 04-472-8330; www.arg.org.nz/embassy/default.htm; Level 14, 142 Lambton Quay, Wellington)

UK (☎ 020-7318-1300; www.argentine-embassy-uk.org in Spanish; 65 Brook St, London W1K 4AH)

USA (☎ 202-238-6401; www.embajadaargentinaeeuu.org; 1600 New Hampshire Ave NW, Washington, DC 20009)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

This is just a brief list; check city listings for more. For Argentine holidays see opposite.

February/March

Carnaval Late February/early March. Especially rowdy in Guleguaychú and Corrientes.

Buenos Aires Tango Late February/early March. Argentina kicks up its high heels (www.tangodata.com.ar).

May

Día de la Virgen de Lújan May 8. The Virgin Mary is tops in Lújan.

November

Día de la Tradición Mid-November. *Gaacho* celebrations, especially in San Antonio de Areco.

FOOD & DRINK

Argentine Cuisine

As a whole, Argentina does not have widely varied cuisine – most folks here seem to survive on meat, pasta and pizza – but the country's famous beef is sublime. At a *parrilla* (steakhouse) or *asado* (private barbecue) try *bife de chorizo* (thick sirloin), *bife de lomo* (tenderloin) or a *parrillada* (a mixed grill of cheaper beef cuts and organ meats). Ask for *chimichurri*, a spicy sauce of garlic, parsley and olive oil. If you want your steak rare say *jugoso*; medium is *a punto*, but you're on your own with well-done.

The Italian influence is apparent in dishes like pizza, spaghetti, ravioli and chewy *ño-*

quis (gnocchi). Vegetarian fare is available in Buenos Aires and other large cities. *Tenedor libres* (all-you-can-eat buffets) are popular everywhere and often great value. Middle Eastern food is common in the north, while the northwest has spicy dishes like those of Bolivia or Peru. In Patagonia lamb is king, while specialties such as trout, boar and venison are served around the Lake District.

Confiterías usually grill sandwiches like *lomito* (steak), *milanesa* (a thin breaded steak) and hamburgers. *Restaurantes* have larger menus and professional waiters. Cafés are important social places for everything from marriage proposals to revolutions, and many also serve alcohol and simple meals.

Large supermarkets often have a counter with good, cheap takeout. Western fast-food chains exist in larger cities.

Breakfast is a simple affair of coffee, tea or mate with *tostadas* (toast), *manteca* (butter) and *mermelada* (jam). *Medialunas* (croissants) come either sweet or plain. Lunch is around 1pm, teatime around 5pm and dinner usually after 8pm (few restaurants open before this hour).

Empanadas are baked or fried turnovers with vegetables, beef, cheese or other fillings. *Sandwichitos de miga* (thin, crust-free sandwiches layered with ham and cheese) are great at teatime. Commonly sold at kiosks, *alfajores* are cookie sandwiches filled with *dulce de leche* (a thin milky caramel) or *mermelada* and covered in chocolate.

Postres (desserts) include *ensalada de fruta* (fruit salad), pies and cakes, *facturas* (pastries) and flan, which can be topped with *crema* (whipped cream) or *dulce de leche*. Argentina's Italian-derived *helados* (ice cream) are South America's best.

The usual *propina* (tip) at restaurants is 10%, provided a service charge hasn't already been included in the bill.

Drinks

ALCOHOLIC DRINKS

Argentines like to drink (but not to excess), and you'll find long lists of beer, wine, cognac, whiskey and gin at many places. Both Quilmes and Isenbeck are popular beers; in bars or cafés, ask for *chopp* (draft or lager). Microbrews are widely available in the Lake District.

Some Argentine wines are world-class; both reds (*tintos*) and whites (*blancos*) are excellent,

but Malbecs are especially well known. The major wine-producing areas are near Mendoza, San Juan, La Rioja and Salta.

NONALCOHOLIC DRINKS

Soft drinks are everywhere. For water, there's *con gas* (carbonated) or *sin gas* (noncarbonated) mineral water. Or ask for Argentina's usually drinkable *agua de canilla* (tap water). For fresh-squeezed orange juice, ask for *jugo de naranja exprimido*. *Licudados* are water- or milk-blended fruit drinks.

Even in the smallest town, coffee will be espresso. *Café chico* is thick, dark coffee in a very small cup (try a *ristretto*, with even less water). *Café cortado* is a small coffee with a touch of milk; *cortado doble* is a larger portion. *Café con leche* (a latte) is served for breakfast only; after lunch or dinner, request a *cortado*.

Tea is commonplace. You shouldn't decline an invitation for grasslike mate, although it's definitely an acquired taste.

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELERS

Argentina is a strongly Catholic country, but enclaves of tolerance toward gays and lesbians do exist (especially in Buenos Aires, which is now South America's top gay tourist destination). In fact Argentina has become Latin America's first country to accept civil unions between same-sex couples.

Argentine men are more physically demonstrative than you may be used to, so behaviors such as cheek kisses or a vigorous embrace are commonplace. Lesbians walking hand in hand should attract little attention, as heterosexual Argentine women often do, but this would be suspicious behavior for males. In general, do your thing – but be discreet.

For more information in Buenos Aires see the boxed text, p67.

HEALTH

Argentina requires no vaccinations. Malaria is a minor concern in the more rural, lowland border sections of Salta, Jujuy, Corrientes and Misiones provinces. In the high Andes, watch for signs of altitude sickness and use more sunscreen. For more (conservative) information see www.cdc.gov/travel/temsam.htm.

Urban water supplies are usually potable, making salads and ice safe to consume. Many prescription drugs are available over the counter. Seek out an embassy recommendation if you need serious Western-type medical

services. For more information, see the Health chapter (p1090).

HOLIDAYS

Government offices and businesses close on most national holidays, which are often moved to the nearest Monday or Friday to extend weekends. Provincial holidays are not listed here.

Año Nuevo (New Year's Day) January 1

Semana Santa (Easter) March/April; dates vary

Día de la Memoria (Anniversary of 1976's military coup) March 24

Día de las Malvinas (Malvinas Day) April 2

Día del Trabajador (Labor Day) May 1

Revolución de Mayo (May Revolution of 1810) May 25

Día de la Bandera (Flag Day) June 20

Día de la Independencia (Independence Day) July 9

Día de San Martín (Anniversary of San Martín's death) August 17

Día de la Raza (Columbus Day) October 12

Día de la Concepción Inmaculada (Immaculate Conception Day) December 8

Navidad (Christmas Day) December 25

INTERNET ACCESS

Argentina is online: every city and town in the country, no matter how small, has internet cafés. In downtown Buenos Aires they're on practically every corner. Most *locutorios* (telephone offices) also offer internet access. Costs are very affordable, from around US50¢ per hour, depending on the city. Unless they're exceptional, we don't mention internet cafés in our city listings.

To type the @ (*arroba*) symbol, hold down the Alt-key while typing 64 on the keypad.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Argentina Turistica (www.argentinaturistica.com) Good all around info on Argentina.

Buenos Aires Expatriates Group (www.baexpats.com) Also good for travelers.

Buenos Aires Herald (www.buenosairesherald.com) BA's excellent English newspaper.

Lanic (www.lanic.utexas.edu/la/argentina) A massive list of Argentine websites.

Lonely Planet (www.lonelyplanet.com) The internet's best, with awesome forum.

Sectur (www.sectur.gov.ar) The official tourism site.

LANGUAGE

Besides flamboyance, the unique pronunciation of *castellano* – Argentina's Italian-accented version of the Spanish language – readily

identifies an Argentine elsewhere in Latin America or abroad. If you're in Buenos Aires you'll also hear *lunfardo*, the capital's colorful slang.

Some immigrants retain their language as a badge of identity. Quechua speakers, numerous in the northwest, tend to be bilingual in Spanish. Many Mapuche speakers live in the southern Andes, while most Guaraní speakers live in northeastern Argentina. English is understood by many Argentines, especially in Buenos Aires.

See the Language chapter for more information. And pick up a copy of Lonely Planet's *Latin American Spanish Phrasebook* to avoid cluelessness.

LEGAL MATTERS

Argentina's police have a reputation for corruption and abuse of power, so do your best to obey the law. Marijuana and many other substances that are illegal in the US and most European countries are also illegal here. Though constitutionally a person is innocent until proven guilty, people are regularly held for years without a trial. If arrested, you have the constitutional right to a lawyer, a telephone call and to remain silent.

If you behave, it's unlikely you'll run into trouble with the police. Mention contacting your consulate if you do have a run-in. In all events, it's a good idea to carry identification (or copies in a pinch) and always be courteous and cooperative when dealing with police or government officials.

MAPS

If you plan to hang around the capital, grab a copy of Lonely Planet's *Buenos Aires* laminated map.

All tourist offices will have decent maps for general sightseeing. In many cities, newspaper kiosks and bookstores stock good maps. For detailed hiking maps check with the local Club Andino or any National Parks office, which have outlets in outdoors-oriented cities.

Argentina's legal age for:

- Drinking: 18
- Voting: 18
- Driving: 18
- Sex (heterosexual or homosexual): 16

The **Automóvil Club Argentino** (ACA; www.aca.org.ar), the main branch of which is in **Palermo** (☎ 011-4802-6061; Av del Libertador 1850), publishes some excellent city and provincial maps; members of ACA's overseas affiliates get discounts with their card. True map nerds can visit the **Instituto Geográfico Militar** (☎ 011-4576-5576; Cabildo 381) in Buenos Aires.

MEDIA

The English-language daily *Buenos Aires Herald* (www.buenosairesherald.com) covers the world from an international perspective. The most important Spanish dailies are upper class *La Nación* and the fun tabloid *Clarín*. *Página 12* provides a refreshing leftist perspective and often breaks important stories. *Ámbito Financiero* is the voice of the business sector, but it also provides good cultural coverage.

Argentina has dozens of channels on cable TV, with plenty of radio stations across the country as well.

MONEY

Carrying a combination of US dollars, Argentine pesos and at least one ATM card is best. Since devaluation in 2002 the peso has stabilized at about three to one US dollar, though in a volatile country like Argentina this could quickly change.

ATMs

Cajeros automáticos (ATMs) are the best way to go in Argentina, whether you're in a big city or small town. Practically every bank has one, transactions are straightforward and exchange rates are reasonable. Most ATMs have English instructions. Savvy travelers bring more than one card, just in case.

When getting cash out consider withdrawing an odd number like 390 pesos, instead of 400. This will guarantee you some small bills; just *try* breaking a 100 peso note for a 10 peso sale – you'll get groans for sure.

Bargaining

Bargaining is possible in the northwest and in craft fairs countrywide. If you stay several days at a hotel, you can often negotiate a better rate. Many higher-range hotels will give discounts for cash payments.

Cash

Bills come in denominations of two, five, 10, 20, 50 and 100 pesos. One peso equals

TWO-TIER COSTS IN ARGENTINA

Don't be surprised if, as a traveling foreigner, you're charged more than Argentine residents on occasion. Since the devaluation of the peso in 2002, some hotels, many museums, most national parks and one major airline have adopted a two-tier price system. Rates for foreigners can be close to double the locals' price. While it's somewhat useless to complain to service personnel at government-run entities about this discrepancy, you can at least choose to stay at hotels that don't discriminate. Simply ask them if they charge more for foreigners than residents, and if you don't like it go to a hotel that charges everyone the same.

To our knowledge, no accommodation listed in this Argentina chapter has adopted this two-tier system.

100 centavos. Coins come in five, 10, 25 and 50 centavos and one peso. Always carry change.

Although all prices in this book are quoted in US dollars, and many businesses in Argentina will accept US dollars, not all places will take them. Carry local currency for small purchases, patriotic merchants and government offices.

In Buenos Aires especially be aware of fake bills. For photos of authentic coins and bills see www.easybuenosairescity.com/currency.htm.

Credit Cards

The larger a hotel is, the greater the chance it will accept credit cards. Ditto for stores and other services. Some businesses add a *recargo* (surcharge) of up to 10% to credit card purchases; always ask before charging. Note that restaurant tips can't be added to the bill and must be paid in cash.

MasterCard and Visa are the main honchos, but American Express is also commonly accepted. Cash advances are possible but discuss the terms with your credit card company beforehand. Also, let your company know you'll be using your card(s) abroad.

Exchanging Money

US dollars and certain other currencies can be converted to Argentine pesos at most banks

or *cambios* (exchange houses). Some banks will only exchange a minimum amount (say, US\$100) so check before lining up. *Cambios* offer slightly poorer rates, but usually have fewer restrictions.

Since the major currency devaluation in January 2002, Buenos Aires' Av Florida has seen a proliferation of shady figures offering '*cambio, cambio, cambio*' to passing pedestrians. Using these unofficial street changers is not recommended; there are quite a few fake bills floating about.

Traveler's checks are very difficult to cash (even at banks) and suffer poor exchange rates. They're not recommended as your main source of traveling money.

Exchange rates at press time included the following:

Country	Unit	Arg\$ (peso)
Australia	A\$1 =	2.32
Canada	C\$1 =	2.74
euro zone	€1 =	3.90
Japan	¥100 =	2.60
New Zealand	NZ\$1 =	2.04
UK	UK£1 =	5.76
United States	US\$1 =	3.09

POST

Letters and postcards (up to 20g) to the US, Europe and Australia cost around US\$1.50. You can send packages under 2kg from any post office, but anything heavier needs to go through *aduana* (a customs office).

Correo Argentino (www.correoargentino.com.ar) – the privatized postal service – has become more dependable over the years, but send essential mail *certificado* (registered). Private couriers, such as OCA and FedEx, are available in some larger cities – but are much more expensive.

RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL

Unlike Bolivia or Peru, modern Argentina doesn't have huge numbers of indigenous peoples with delicate cultures. Most responsible travel here includes how you behave in the country's more pristine areas, such as the village of El Chaltén (which is located inside a national park!). Common sense rules: keep water sources potable by washing 100 steps away from rivers and lakes, don't litter (this includes cigarette butts) and avoid walking off-trail.

STUDYING

Since the devaluation of the peso, Argentina has become a hot (and cheap) destination in which to learn Spanish. For a partial list of Spanish schools in Buenos Aires, see p59. Other large cities, such as Bariloche, Mendoza and Córdoba, also have Spanish schools.

TELEPHONE

Telecom and Telefónica are the major Argentine phone companies. *Locutorios* (small telephone offices) are very common in any city; you enter private booths, make calls, then pay at the front counter. These may cost more than street phones but are better for privacy and quiet, and you won't run out of coins.

Calling the US, Europe and Australia from *locutorios* is expensive, but rates are discounted evenings and on weekends (and remain cheaper than collect or credit card calls). Least expensive is buying credit phone cards at kiosks or making calls over the internet using Skype or some other system.

To call a cell phone you must first dial ☎ 15, unless you are calling from another cell. When calling out of your area code dial ☎ 0 first. Toll-free numbers in Argentina start with ☎ 0800.

To call someone in Argentina from outside Argentina, you'll need to dial your country's international access code, then Argentina's country code (☎ 54), then the city's area code (leaving out the first 0), then the number itself. (When dialing an Argentine cell phone from outside Argentina, dial your country's international access code, then ☎ 54, then ☎ 9, then the area code and number, leaving out the ☎ 15).

Argentina's main cell phone systems are CDMA and TDMA. It's also possible to use tri-band GSM world cell phones. This is a fast-changing field so check websites like www.kropla.com. For cell phone rental in BA or Córdoba see www.phonerental.com.

TOILETS

Argentina's public toilets are better than most other South American countries, but not quite as good as those in the West. Head to restaurants, fast-food outlets, shopping malls and even large hotels to scout out a seat. Carry toilet paper and don't expect hot water, soap or paper towels to be available.

TOURIST INFORMATION

All tourist-oriented cities in Argentina have a conveniently located tourist office, and many of them have English-speaking staff. Opening hours run from around 8am until around 10pm in the summer months of November to February. Off-season hours are a bit shorter. There are many local variations, of course.

In Buenos Aires, each Argentine province has a tourist office. Also in BA is the excellent **Secretaría de Turismo de la Nación** (Map pp52-3; ☎ 011-4312-2232; 0800-555-0016; www.turismo.gov.ar; Av Santa Fe 883), which dispenses information on all of Argentina.

TRAVELERS WITH DISABILITIES

Mobility-impaired folks will have a tough time in Argentina, where sidewalks are often busy, narrow and cracked. Ramps don't exist at every corner and in smaller towns the side streets are gravel. Higher-end hotels tend to have the best wheelchair access; with restaurants and tourist sights it's best to call ahead.

There are some kneeling buses in Buenos Aires (forget the Subte), but taxis are so common and cheap that it's definitely best to use them. Even small towns have *remises*. In Buenos Aires **Movidisc** (Map pp52-3; ☎ 011-4328-6921, 15-5247-6571; www.movidisc-web.com.ar; Diagonal Roque Sáenz Peña 868, 3rd fl) provides transportation, while **Casa Escalada** (☎ 011-4683-6478; www.casaescalada.com.ar; Rivadavia 9649) offers wheelchair rental.

These websites have no Argentina info but are good for general travel tips: www.access-able.com and www.sath.org.

VISAS

Residents of Canada, the US, Australia, and many western European countries do not need visas to enter Argentina; they receive an automatic 90-day stamp on arrival. It's smart to double-check this information with your embassy before you leave, as changes often occur.

For visa extensions (90 days), visit *migraciones* (immigration offices) in the provincial capitals. There's also an immigration office in Buenos Aires (see p48). For a list of embassies and consulates, see p167. For information on obtaining Argentine residency, see www.argentinaresidency.com.

VOLUNTEERING

Volunteer opportunities in Argentina include the following:

Buenos Aires Volunteer (www.bavolunteer.org.ar)

Work in social organizations while taking Spanish classes and participating in cultural activities.

Help Argentina (www.helpargentina.org) Positions from distributing food to graphic design to fundraising to event organizing. Also offers internships.

Interrupción (www.interrupcion.net) Instigators of social responsibility and change, with volunteer and internship jobs. Offers organizational platforms for social project developments.

La Montaña (www.lamontana.com) This Spanish school in Bariloche runs social, educational and environmental volunteer programs, but you don't have to be a student to participate.

Parque Nacional Los Glaciares (in El Chaltén

☎ 02962-430-004; seccionallagoviedma@apn.gov.ar)

Summer work with park rangers in El Chaltén. College degree required; outdoor experience and Spanish language skills preferred.

Patagonia Volunteer (www.patagoniavolunteer.org)

Skills needed in medicine, teaching, construction, agriculture etc. Works for indigenous people's rights. Also contact Dario Calfunao at Piuke Mapu Hostel in Esquel.

South American Explorers (www.saexplorers.org) Contact its Buenos Aires clubhouse (where volunteers can also work) for more information.

WOMEN TRAVELERS

Being a woman traveler in Argentina is not difficult, even if you're alone. In some ways Argentina is a safer place for a woman than Europe, the USA and most other Latin American countries. Argentina is a *machismo* culture, however, and some men will feel the

need to comment on a woman's attractiveness. They'll try to get your attention by hissing, whistling, or making *piropos* (flirtatious comments). Much as you may want to kick them where it counts, the best thing to do is completely ignore them – like Argentine women do. After all, most men don't mean to be rude, and many local women even consider *piropos* to be compliments.

On the plus side of *machismo*, expect men to hold a door open for you and let you enter first, including getting on buses; this gives you a better chance at grabbing an empty seat, so get in there quick.

WORKING

Despite a recovering economy, many Argentines are still unemployed or underemployed. Don't expect to find a quick job here and get rich – it just won't happen.

There are some English-teaching jobs in Buenos Aires and other major cities, but most teachers make just enough to get by, maybe US\$5 per hour. Having a TESOL or TESL certificate will be an advantage in acquiring work.

Many teachers work 'illegally' on tourist visas, which they must renew every three months (in BA this usually means hopping to Uruguay a few times per year). Work schedules drop off during the holiday months of January and February, when those who can afford to take English classes can afford to travel around the country.

For job postings, check out the classifieds in the **Herald** (www.buenosairesherald.com), or contact expat organizations like **Buenos Aires Expatriates Group** (www.baexpats.com/article13/html).