

Argentina Top Tips



Many of the tips we provided for Chile also apply to Argentina – buses are affordable and run on time; what we said about learning some basic Spanish, catching taxis, toilet tips and safety precautions all apply. There also lots of places where you can drink the tap water, especially in Patagonia.

So, we'd recommend reading the Chilean tips too. Here we've tried to come up with some additional tips to further enhance your visit to Argentina. We hope you'll find them useful.

Ten Tips

1. Organise Your Reciprocity Fee Payment in Advance

Australians visiting Argentina need to pay a "reciprocity fee". At the time of our visit in February 2016 it was \$US100. It needs to be organised and paid in advance on-line before you arrive in the country. We met an American man who had been turned back at the border crossing between Puerto Natales and El Calafate in Patagonia because he had not done this (Americans are among a number of nationalities who have to pay the fee).

Once you have completed the process on-line you need to print out a receipt with bar code that is used by Argentinian customs to verify your payment.

For Australians the Australian Government Smartraveller website is a good place to check on current entry requirements for Argentina (and all other countries). www.smartraveller.gov.au

2. Be Careful Crossing the Street

So, you've just spent some time in Chile before visiting Argentina, and you learned that Chilean drivers are generally very aware of pedestrian crossings. No difficulty crossing the road in Chile.

Don't be fooled into thinking that the same rules apply in Argentina – because they don't. Pedestrian crossings might still be marked on the streets in Argentina, but if you think cars will stop if you step off the curb you are likely to be dangerously mistaken. Take care!

3. Eat Steak

Apologies to the vegans, including my own nieces and nephew, but Argentina has the best steaks in the world (though it may be a dead heat with Uruguay).

At the parrilla (pronounced parr-eesha) restaurants the chefs have made entire careers based on knowing how to cook the perfect steak. This, combined with the free range rearing of Argentinian beef, makes for a great result. The only thing missing now is the wine – so read on.

4. Drink the Wine, especially the Malbec

Chile has it's carmenere, Uruguay it's tannat, and Argentina's signature grape is malbec, particularly that which comes from Mendoza in the west of the country.

Nothing complements that parrilla cooked steak better than a glass of deep red malbec wine. Yum.

5. Try Mate

Half the adult population of Argentina walk around at all times carrying thermos flasks and a small round cup with a metal straw sticking out the top. This is mate (pronounced mah-tay).

Mate is a green herbal tea which tastes a bit like asian green tea. Many people sip it constantly, using their thermoses to keep the cup topped up.

People also share mate a lot as a social custom (though if you're offered it don't touch the straw – apparently that's not appropriate).

If you don't get a chance to try to real thing it also comes in teabag form and will probably be on offer at the breakfast included at your guesthouse.

We also note that Uruguayans seemed to be even more addicted to mate than Argentiniens.

6. Get your Tongue Around the Double L - "Sh"

If you've been to Chile prior to Argentina, or maybe you've been to Spain, you'll probably know that in Spanish the double L makes a 'Y' sound, so chicken is pollo, pronounced poy-oh; and "My name is Ken" is " me llamo (yam-oh) Ken".

But the Argentiniens pronounce the double L as an 'sh' sound so pollo is posh-oh; me sham-oh Ken; a llama is a sharm-a; a bottle (botella) is a bot-ay-sha; and a key (llave) is a shah-ve

If you add the 'sh' flourish when ordering your chicken dinner it will be noted and appreciated by the waiter.

7. Go to a Tango Show

When we were in Buenos Aires in 2007 we went to a local tango show at a small cafe in the restaurant district, Palermo. There were two couples who took turns with different styles of tango. They constantly changed their colourful outfits.

Towards the end of the show they included a bit of audience participation, and our then 17 year old son, Alex was "volunteered". He did well and the show was great.

You may also be lucky and come across tango buskers, especially around the Boca tourist precinct.

8. Ain't Nobody Don't Like Ham and Cheese.

To mis-quote the donkey from the Shrek films: "ain't nobody don't like (parfait) ham and cheese".

Yes, it is everywhere. For breakfast it is the staple offering. For lunch – how about a ham and cheese empananda? And for dinner, why not a milanese a la napolitana – schnitzel with ham and cheese on top.

And yes, betcha that long distance bus or internal flight provides you with a ham and cheese sandwich.

What that's you say – you don't like ham and cheese. Best stay at home.

9. For Those with a Sweet Tooth – there's Dulce de Leche.

Dulce de leche is a thick, caramel coloured and uber sweet tasting spread

made from condensed milk. Chileans, Argentinians and Uruguayans love it.

Unless you have a very sweet tooth you may find it a bit cloying. It's worth a try, but go easy, if you don't want to return home with diabetes.

Apart from the spread there are a multitude of cakey sweets available in dulce de leche flavour. I must admit I didn't mind the dulce de leche icecream.

10. Visit Patagonia

While this section is meant to about general tips for Argentina we couldn't help but add a plug for Patagonia. If you have the time and can afford it Patagonia, both the Chilean and Argentinian sides, are fantastic. You'll see on this blog posts about both.

Definitely one of the most interesting and spectacular regions on the planet.