



The Pampas & the Atlantic Coast

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Why Go?

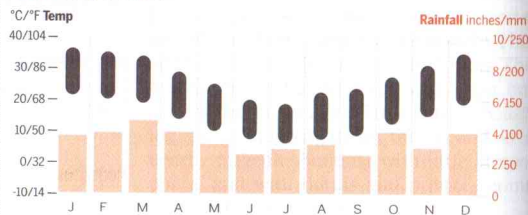
The seemingly endless fertile grasslands that make up the pampas financed Argentina's golden years over a century ago, and the area is still the nation's economic and political powerhouse. Not only does most of Argentina's juicy beef come from here, but the region is also home to 40% of Argentina's voters.

These humble pampas are often overlooked by travelers, but there are hidden gems here and there. A visit to lovely San Antonio de Areco offers a taste of living gaucho culture, while the picturesque hills around Tandil and Sierra de la Ventana offer plenty of opportunities for hiking. And the Atlantic coast's bustling beaches make a great escape from Buenos Aires' summer heat.

You can also spend a few days in one of the region's many historic *estancias* (ranches), where the huge sky and faded elegance of Argentina's past can all be experienced first-hand.

When to Go

Mar del Plata



Jan-Feb Summer means great weather for the beach resorts, though prices and crowds skyrocket.

Oct-Nov & Mar-Apr Spring and fall are fine times to explore Tandil and Sierra de la Ventana.

Early Nov Día de la Tradición – the gaucho celebration – begins in San Antonio de Areco.

NORTHERN PAMPAS

The pampas is both a general term for a large geographic region of fertile plains and the name of the province that lies to the west of Buenos Aires. The pampas grasslands roll southwards from the Río de la Plata to the banks of the Río Negro, stretching west towards the Andes and all the way up to the

southern parts of Córdoba and Santa Fe provinces, taking in the entire Buenos Aires and La Pampa provinces.

The rich soil and lush natural grasses of the northern pampas make it Argentina's best cattle-raising country. The region yields plentiful hides, beef, wool and wheat for global markets, stamping Argentina on the world's economic map.



The Pampas & the Atlantic Coast Highlights

- 1 Soak up the sun and crowds in the Atlantic Coast's largest city, **Mar del Plata** (p128)
- 2 Peek through a natural rock 'window' atop the mountain **Cerro de la Ventana** (p121)
- 3 Go gaucho in **San Antonio de Areco** (p112), the prettiest town in the pampas
- 4 Sample some country life – and deli meats and cheese – in pleasant **Tandil** (p115)
- 5 Go windsurfing, kiteboarding or cycling in the beach resort of **Pinamar** (p125)
- 6 Explore the lagoon, spot flamingos or just chill out in **Mar Chiquita** (p129)
- 7 Join the masses on their holy pilgrimage to **Luján** (p110)

From the mid-19th century, the province of Buenos Aires was the undisputed political and economic center of the country. When the city of Buenos Aires became Argentina's capital, the province submitted to national authority but didn't lose its influence. By the 1880s, after a brief but contentious civil war, the province responded by creating its own provincial capital in the model city of La Plata.

La Plata

📍0221 / POP 650,000

Just over an hour from Buenos Aires, this bustling university town has the same belle époque architecture, gracious municipal buildings, leafy parks and nightlife as BA, but on a smaller scale. The big tourist draws are its natural history museum, one of Argentina's best, and the imposing neo-Gothic cathedral.

When Buenos Aires became Argentina's new capital, Governor Dardo Rocha founded La Plata in 1882 to give the province of Buenos Aires its own top city. Rocha chose engineer Pedro Benoit's elaborate city plan, based upon balance and logic, with diagonal avenues crossing the regular 5km-square grid pattern to connect the major plazas, creating a distinctive star design. Elegant on paper, this blueprint creates confusion at

many intersections, with up to eight streets going off in all directions. However, it probably made La Plata South America's first completely planned city.

📍 Sights

La Plata's main sights are all within walking distance. Near Plaza Moreno is the neo-Gothic **cathedral** (📍423-3931; www.catedraldelaplata.com; 🕒10am-7pm), which was begun in 1885 but not inaugurated until 1932. The cathedral was inspired by medieval predecessors in Cologne and Amiens, and has fine stained glass and polished granite floors; tours (daily at 11am, 2:30pm and 4pm, reservations necessary) are AR\$10 and include a museum and elevator ride to the top. There's also a gift shop and cafe.

Opposite the cathedral is the **Palacio Municipal**, designed in German Renaissance style by Hanoverian architect Hubert Stiers. On the west side of the plaza, the **Museo y Archivo Dardo Rocha** (📍427-5591; Calle 50, No 935; admission free; 🕒9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 3-6pm Sat & Sun) was the vacation house of the city's creator and contains period furniture and many of his personal knickknacks.

Two blocks northeast, the **Teatro Argentino** (Av 51, btwn Calle 9 & Calle 10) is a fantastically ugly concrete monolith, but boasts great acoustics and quality performances:

ballet, symphony orchestras and opera. Two blocks further northeast, in front of Plaza San Martín, is the ornate **Palacio de la Legislatura**, also in German Renaissance style. Nearby, catch the French Classic **Pasaje Dardo Rocha**, once La Plata's main railroad station and now the city's major cultural center, containing two museums. Also close by is the Flemish Renaissance **Casa de Gobierno**, housing the provincial governor and his retinue. On Sundays, check out the lively **feria artesanal** (crafts fair) on Plaza Italia.

Plantations of eucalyptus, ginkgo, palm and subtropical hardwoods cover **Paseo del Bosque**, parkland expropriated from an *estancia* at the time of the city's founding. It attracts a collection of strolling families, smooching lovers and sweaty joggers. Various interesting sights are strewn within, such as a small lake with paddleboats for rent; the open-air **Teatro Martín Fierro**, that hosts music and drama performances; the **Observatorio Astronómico** (📍423-6593; www.fcaglp.unlp.edu.ar); the modest **Jardín Zoológico** (📍427-3925; admission AR\$5; 🕒10am-6pm Tue-Sun); and the **Museo de La Plata** (📍425-7744; www.fcnym.unlp.edu.ar/abamuse.html; admission AR\$6, free Tuesdays; 🕒10am-6pm Tue-Sun). This excellent museum

has paleontological, zoological, archaeological and anthropological collections of famous Patagonian explorer Francisco P. Moreno. Countless display rooms offer something for everyone: Egyptian tomb relics, Jesuit art, amusing taxidermy, amazing skeletons, mummies, fossils, rocks and minerals, scary insects and reconstructed dinosaurs. There's also a cafe. Arrange English tours in advance; it's worth going to on weekends when school groups aren't around.

One of Argentina's most famous homes is **Casa Curutchet** (📍482-2631; www.capba.org.ar; Av 53 No 320; admission local/foreigner AR\$10/40; 🕒10am-2pm Tue-Fri, closed Jan), designed by French-Swiss architect Le Corbusier for Pedro Curutchet, an Argentine surgeon. It's a beautiful piece of modern architecture and was featured in the award-winning movie *El hombre de al lado* (2009). Reserve in advance for tours.

If you just want to catch La Plata's main sights, hop on the **Bus Turístico** (www.buenosaires.tur.ar/busturistico; admission free) – it's an open-roofed tourist bus that runs from Friday to Sunday only, four times per day. Loops take one hour.

🏠 Sleeping

Benevento Hotel HOTEL \$
(📍423-7721; www.hotelbenevento.com.ar; Calle 2, No 645; s AR\$288-360, d AR\$420-530; 📞📺) This charmingly renovated hotel offers beautiful rooms with high ceilings and cable TV. Most have wood floors, plus balconies overlooking the busy street; top-floor rooms are the most modern and sport views.

Frankville Hostel HOSTEL \$
(📍482-3100; www.frankville.com.ar; Calle 46, No 781; dm AR\$55-65, d AR\$150; 📞📺) La Plata's first hostel and still its best one. Dorms are small with shared bathrooms outside but they're clean and have lockers. Back patio for socializing; there are plans for rooms with private bathrooms. HI (Hostelling International) card discount.

Hostel del Bosque HOSTEL \$
(📍489-0236; www.hosteldelbosque.com.ar; Calle 54, No 460; dm AR\$55-75, r AR\$160; 📞📺) Located in a modern building block with little *onda* (good vibes), but the back patio garden is great. Dorms are tight and there's one ensuite private room. Rooftop terrace and one secure parking spot available; well-located.

La Plata



La Plata

📍 Sights

- | | |
|------------------------------------|----|
| 1 Casa Curutchet..... | C2 |
| 2 Casa de Gobierno..... | C2 |
| 3 Cathedral..... | B3 |
| 4 Feria Artesanal..... | B2 |
| 5 Jardín Zoológico..... | C1 |
| 6 Museo de La Plata..... | D1 |
| 7 Museo y Archivo Dardo Rocha..... | A3 |
| 8 Observatorio Astronómico..... | D1 |
| 9 Palacio de la Legislatura..... | B2 |
| 10 Palacio Municipal..... | B3 |
| 11 Pasaje Dardo Rocha..... | B2 |
| 12 Paseo del Bosque..... | D1 |
| 13 Teatro Argentino..... | B3 |
| 14 Teatro Martín Fierro..... | D2 |

🏠 Sleeping

- | | |
|---------------------------|----|
| 15 Benevento Hotel..... | B1 |
| 16 Frankville Hostel..... | A2 |
| 17 Hostel del Bosque..... | C2 |
| 18 Hotel García..... | B1 |

🍴 Eating

- | | |
|---------------------------|----|
| 19 Carnes Don Pedro..... | B2 |
| 20 Cervecería Modelo..... | C2 |
| 21 Wilkenny..... | B3 |

BUSES FROM LA PLATA

DESTINATION	COST (ARS)	DURATION (HR)
Bahía Blanca	240-270	8-10
Bariloche	520-590	24
Córdoba	250-290	10
Mar del Plata	140	5
Mendoza	400	15

Hotel García

HOTEL \$\$

(Calle 2, No 525; s AR\$100, d AR\$150) Friendly and clean, this budget place 200m from the bus terminal offers 20 small, basic rooms. Showers are open – so everything in the bathroom gets wet – but the cable TV makes up for it.

Eating & Drinking

TOP CHOICE **Cervecería Modelo** ARGENTINE \$\$
(cnr Calles 5 & 54; mains AR\$35-60; ☺breakfast, lunch & dinner; ☺) Dating from 1894, its ceiling hung with hams and peanut shells strewn on the floor, this classic place serves ice-cold ales to a happy crowd. There are great sidewalk tables, and it's not too old to boast a big-screen TV and wi-fi.

Wilkeny

ARGENTINE \$\$

(cnr Calle 11 & 50; mains AR\$35-60; ☺breakfast, lunch & dinner) Popular place with a traditional Irish-pub feel and a decent range of food such as salads, sandwiches and pastas. On Thursday and Friday nights you might catch some live music.

Carnes Don Pedro

ARGENTINE \$

(Diagonal Norte 1005; per kilo AR\$49; ☺lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Great cheap takeout-only option; just pile up your choices and head to nearby Plaza San Martín for a picnic. There's plenty of food, from fresh salads to *parrilla* (mixed grill) to many cooked meat and vegetable dishes.

A 10-minute taxi ride from the center, in the historic bohemian neighborhood Meridiano V, you'll find **Bar Imperio** (Calle 17, btwn Calles 70 & 71), **Mirapampa** (cnr Calles 17 & 71) and **Ciudad Vieja** (cnr Calles 17 & 71), all restaurant-bars offering live music from Thursday to Sunday nights. There's also a weekend crafts fair, plus theater, cinema and cultural centers – no wonder it's popular with students.

Information

Municipal tourist office (☎427-1535; www.laplata.gov.ar; ☺10am-5:30pm Mon-Fri, 11am-4pm Sat & Sun) Just off Plaza San Martín.

Post office (cnr Calle 4 & Av 51)

Getting There & Away

Plaza bus 129 connects Buenos Aires with La Plata every 20 minutes (AR\$10, 1¼ hours). It leaves from the side street Martín Zuvería, located almost directly in front of Buenos Aires' Retiro train station, making stops along Ave 9 Julio and at Constitución train station.

La Plata's bus terminal has plenty of connections to other parts of Argentina.

La Plata is also served by Buenos Aires' Roca suburban train line, with regular services from the Constitución station.

Luján

☎02323 / POP 106,000

Luján is a pleasant, compact riverside town that several times per year overflows with pilgrims making their way to Argentina's most important shrine. It boasts a huge Spanish-style plaza with imposing neo-Gothic cathedral, as well as a couple of interesting museums. The riverside area is lined with restaurants and barbecue stands selling *choripan* (a spicy pork sausage in a crunchy roll). You can rent boats for a paddle, while a chairlift carries sightseers over the grubby river – an oddly charming touch.

On the first Saturday in October thousands of Catholics start a 65km pilgrimage walk from Buenos Aires to Luján (see boxed text, p111). Other large gatherings occur on May 8 (**Virgin's Day**), the first weekend in August (the colorful **Peregrinación Boliviana**), the last weekend in September (the '**gaucho**' pilgrimage – watch for horses) and December 8 (**Immaculate Conception Day**).

Sights

Basilica Nuestra Señora de Luján CATHEDRAL
Every year over five million pilgrims from throughout Argentina visit Luján to honor the Virgin for her intercession in affairs of peace, health, forgiveness and consolation. The terminus of their journey is this imposing basilica, built from 1887 to 1935. The neo-Gothic church is made from a lovely rose-colored stone that glows in the setting sun. The statue of the Virgin, which dates from 1630, sits in the high chamber behind

the main altar. Under the basilica you can tour a **crypt** (admission AR\$4; ☺frequent between 10am-5pm) that's inhabited by Virgin statues from all over the world. Masses take place in the basilica several times a day.

Complejo Museográfico Enrique Udaondo

MUSEUM

(admission AR\$1; ☺2:30-5pm Wed, 11:30am-5pm Thu & Fri, 10:30am-6pm Sat, Sun & holidays) This gorgeous colonial-era museum complex rambles with several display rooms, pretty patios and gardens. The Sala General José de San Martín showcases Argentina's battles for independence, while the Sala de Gaucho contains some beautiful *mate* (a tea-like beverage) ware, horse gear and other gaucho paraphernalia.

The nearby **Museo de Transporte** (same details as above) has a remarkable collection of horse-drawn carriages from the late 1800s. Also on display is the first steam locomotive to serve the city from Buenos Aires and a monster of a hydroplane that crossed the Atlantic in 1926. The most offbeat exhibits, however, are the stuffed and scruffy remains of Gato and Mancha, the hardy Argentine criollo horses ridden by adventurer AF Tschiffely from Buenos Aires to New York. This trip took 2½ years, from 1925 to 1928.

LA VIRGENCITA

Argentina's patron saint is a ubiquitous presence – you can spot her poster on butcher-shop walls, her statue in churches throughout the country and her image on the dashboards of taxis. She wears a triangular blue dress, stands on a half-moon and radiates streams of glory from her crowned head.

In 1630 a Portuguese settler in Tucumán asked a friend in Brazil to send him an image of the Virgin for his new chapel. Unsure what style of Virgin was required, the friend sent two – including one of the Immaculate Conception. After setting out from the port of Buenos Aires, the cart bearing the statues got bogged near the river of Luján and only moved when the Immaculate Conception was taken off. Its owner took it as a sign, and left the statue in Luján so that a shrine could be built there. The other statue continued its journey to the northwest.

Since then the Virgin of Luján has been credited with a number of miracles – from curing tumors and sending a fog to hide early settlers from warring Indians, to protecting the province from a cholera epidemic. She was rewarded for her trouble in 1886 when Pope Leo XIII crowned her with a golden coronet set with almost 500 pearls and gems.

The massive pilgrimage to her basilica, where the original statue is still venerated, starts on the first Saturday in October. Throngs of the faithful walk the 65km from the Buenos Aires neighborhood of Liniers to Luján – a journey of up to 18 hours. If you arrive on the first Sunday in October (for Día de Virgen de Luján), you'll spot families of exhausted pilgrims snoozing in the square, enjoying barbecues by the river and filling plastic bottles with holy water from the fountain.

Sleeping

Luján can easily be done on a day trip from Buenos Aires. If you decide to overnight on a weekend, however, be sure to reserve ahead.

Hotel Hoxón

HOTEL \$\$

(☎429970; www.hotelhoxon.com.ar; 9 de Julio 760; s AR\$215-330, d AR\$345-525; ☺☺☺) The best and biggest in town, with modern, clean and comfortable rooms. Superiors are carpeted and come with fridge and air-con. The swimming pool comes with raised sun deck.

Hotel del Virrey

HOTEL \$\$

(☎420797; www.hoteldelvirreylujan.com.ar; San Martín 129; r AR\$280; ☺☺) Right near the basilica is this modern hotel offering small but good rooms.

Hostel Estación Luján

HOSTEL \$

(☎429101; www.estacionlujanhostel.com.ar; 9 de Julio 978; dm AR\$80, s/d AR\$110/190; ☺☺) This small, modern hostel is just steps from the basilica. There are just four clean rooms (including two six-bed dorms), some with balcony, plus kitchen use and a large common area.

Eating

Pilgrims won't go hungry in Luján – the central parts of San Martín, 9 de Julio and the riverfront are all lined with restaurants.

TOP CHOICE L'Eau Vive

FRENCH \$\$

(☎421774; Constitución 2112; 3-course menu AR\$60; ☺lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, lunch only Sun) Just 2km from the town center you'll find this friendly French restaurant run by Carmelite nuns from around the world. Taxis here cost about AR\$15, or take bus 501 from the center.

Cervecería Berlin

ARGENTINE \$

(San Martín 151; mains AR\$20-45; ☺lunch & dinner) With tables on its small front deck, this is a good choice on a warm day. Food isn't fancy – burgers, sandwiches and waffles – but there are plenty of drinks.

Café La Basílica

ARGENTINE \$\$

(San Martín 101; mains AR\$30-60; ☺8am-8pm Mon-Thu, 7am-2am Fri & Sat, 8am-7pm Sun) This classic corner bar offers satisfying meals of homemade pastas and grilled meats. There's English translation on the menu.

i Information

Post office (Mitre 575)

Tourist office (☎427082; ☺8am-5pm) Near the river at the west end of Lavalle, in the domed, yellow building.

i Getting There & Away

Lujan's **bus terminal** (Av de Nuestra Señora de Luján & Almirante Brown) is just three blocks north of the basilica. From Buenos Aires, take Transportes Atlántida's bus 57 from outside the Plaza Italia or Once train stations, which leaves every half-hour (AR\$15, two hours). There are also daily train departures from Estación Once in Buenos Aires, but you need to change trains in Moreno.

San Antonio de Areco

(☎02326 / POP 23,000)

Nestled among lush farmlands, San Antonio de Areco is one of the prettiest town in the pampas. About 115km northwest of Buenos Aires, it welcomes many day-tripping *porteños* who come for the peaceful atmosphere and picturesque colonial streets. The town dates from the early 18th century and preserves a great deal of criollo and gaucho traditions, especially among its artisans, who produce very fine silverwork and saddlery. Gauchos from all over the pampas show up for November's Día de la Tradición, where you can catch them and their horses strutting the cobbled streets in all their finery.

San Antonio de Areco's compact town center and quiet streets are very walkable. Around the Plaza Ruiz de Arellano, named in honor of the town's founding *estanciero* (estancia owner), are several historic buildings, including the **iglesia parroquial** (parish church).

The **puente viejo** (old bridge; 1857), across the Río Areco, follows the original cart road to northern Argentina. Once a toll crossing, it's now a pedestrian bridge leading to San Antonio de Areco's main attraction, the Museo Gauchesco Ricardo Güiraldes.

Areco shuts down during siesta time in the afternoon.

o Sights
Museo Gauchesco Ricardo Güiraldes

MUSEUM

(cnr R Güiraldes & Sosa; admission AR\$10; ☺11am-5pm Thu-Mon) Inaugurated by the provincial government in 1938, a decade after the death of Ricardo Güiraldes, author of the gaucho novel *Don Segundo Sombra* (see the boxed text, p114), this museum in Parque Criollo is a sort of gaucholand of restored or fabricated buildings, including an old flour mill, a re-created *pulpería* (tavern) and a colonial-style chapel. The main deal is a 20th-century reproduction of an 18th-century *casco* (ranch house), which holds a wooden bed belonging to Juan Manuel de Rosas (a famous Argentine *caudillo*, or warlord), lots of gorgeous horse gear and various works of gauchesco art. Two rooms are dedicated to Güiraldes himself.

Museo y Taller Draghi

MUSEUM, WORKSHOP

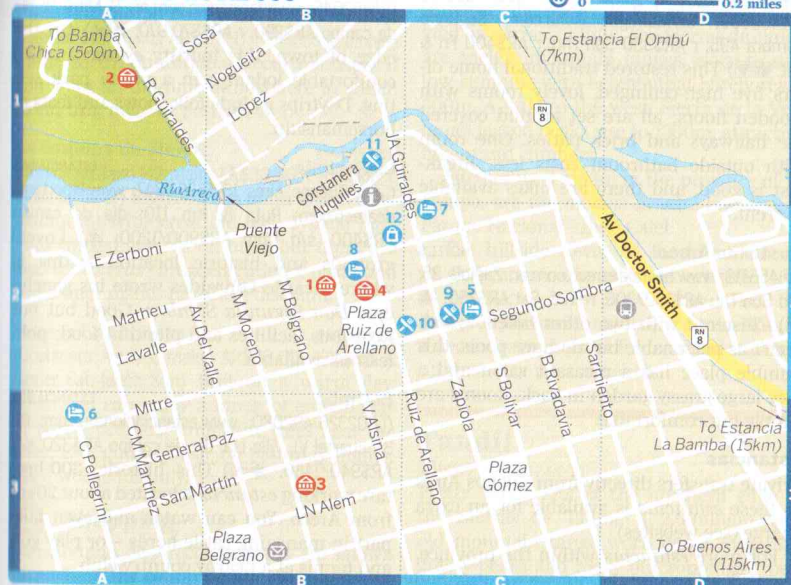
(Lavalle 387; admission AR\$10; ☺10:30am-1pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat, 10:30am-1pm Sun) This small museum and silversmith workshop highlights an exceptional collection of silver *falcónes* (gaucho knives), beautiful horse gear and intricate *mate* paraphernalia. There's also some jewelry and leather bags; everything is for sale.

Museo Las Lilas

MUSEUM

(www.museolaslilas.org; Moreno 279; admission AR\$30; ☺10am-8pm Fri-Sun) Florencio Molina Campos is to Argentines what Norman Rockwell is to Americans – a folk artist with wide-ranging appeal whose themes are based on comical caricatures. This pretty courtyard museum displays his famous works; entry includes coffee and a *medialuna* (croissant) in the cafe. Hours are shorter late May to late September.

San Antonio de Areco


Centro Cultural Usina Vieja

MUSEUM

(V Alsina 66; admission AR\$3; ☺11am-5pm Tue-Sun) Set in an old power plant dating from 1901, the Centro Cultural Usina Vieja is an eclectic museum with a funky collection of ancient radios, sewing machines and record players. Farm equipment, sculptures, an old-time grocery store and even a small airplane are also on display.

🔥 Festivals & Events

San Antonio de Areco is the symbolic center of Argentina's vestigial cowboy culture, and puts on the country's biggest gaucho celebration for **Día de la Tradición** (a week-long event in early to mid-November; call the tourist office for exact dates). If you're in the area, don't miss it; attractions include a horseback procession through the town, displays of horsemanship, folk dancing and craft exhibitions. Main events take place at Parque Criollo.

🛏 Sleeping

While San Antonio is a popular destination for day trips out of Buenos Aires, it's worth hanging around as there are some lovely places to stay. Book on weekends, when prices go up.

San Antonio de Areco

o Sights

- 1 Centro Cultural Usina Vieja.....B2
- 2 Museo Gauchesco Ricardo Güiraldes.....A1
- 3 Museo Las Lilas.....B3
- 4 Museo y Taller Draghi.....B2

🛏 Sleeping

- 5 Antigua Casona.....C2
- 6 Estancia La Cinacina.....A3
- 7 Hostal de Areco.....C2
- 8 Paradores Draghi.....B2

🍴 Eating

- 9 Almacén Ramos Generales.....C2
- 10 La Esquina de Merti.....C2
- 11 Puesto La Lechuzca.....B1

🛏 Shopping

- 12 La Olla de Cobre.....B2

TOP CHOICE Paradores Draghi

GUESTHOUSE \$\$

(☎455583; www.paradoresdraghi.com.ar; Matheu 380; s Sun-Thu only AR\$300, d AR\$400; 🍴🚰🚰🚰) Large, gorgeous rooms (two with kitchenette) are available at this tranquil place. There's a grassy garden with beautiful pool, greenhouse breakfast room and two patios in which to relax.

TOP CHOICE **Antigua Casona** GUESTHOUSE \$\$\$
 (☎)456600; www.antiguacasona.com; Segundo Sombra 495; r AR\$380 Sun-Thu, r AR\$400 Fri & Sat; (☎) This restored traditional home offers five high-ceilinged, lovely rooms with wooden floors; all are set around covered tile hallways and brick patios. One room with outside bathroom costs less. Breakfast is good, and there are bikes available for rent.

Hostal de Areco HOTEL \$
 (☎)456118; www.hostaldeareco.com.ar; Zapiola 25; s/d Sun-Thu AR\$130/200, r Fri & Sat AR\$250; (☎) Clustered with two other hotels, which aren't as personable but do have pools, this humble place has a pleasant salon and a nice large grassy garden in back. Rooms are simple but comfortable.

Estancias

Private transfers directly from Buenos Aires to these *estancias* is available for an extra charge (see websites).

For more *estancias* within the province, see p116.

THE GLORIOUS GAUCHO

If the melancholy *tanguero* (tango dancer) is the essence of the *porteño* (resident of Buenos Aires), then the gaucho represents the pampa: a lone cowboy-like figure, pitted against the elements, with only his horse for a friend.

In the early years of the colony, the fringe-dwelling gauchos lived entirely beyond the laws and customs of Buenos Aires, eking out an independent and often violent existence in the countryside. They slaughtered cattle roaming free and unsupervised on the fertile pampas and drank *mate*, the caffeine-rich herbal tea.

As the colony grew, cattle became too valuable to leave unprotected. Foreign demand for hides increased and investors moved into the pampas to take control of the market, establishing the *estancia* system where large landholdings were handed out to a privileged few. Many free-wheeling gauchos became exploited farmhands, while those who resisted domestication were threatened with prison or the draft.

By the late 19th century, those in charge felt the gaucho had no place in modern Argentina. President Sarmiento (who governed 1868–74) declared that 'fertilizing the soil with their blood is the only thing gauchos are good for' – and already much gaucho blood had been spilled, their horsemanship making them excellent infantrymen for Argentina's civil war and the brutal campaigns against the Indians.

Like so many heroes, the gaucho only won love and admiration after his demise. His physical bravery, honor and lust for freedom are celebrated in José Hernández's 1872 epic poem *Martin Fierro* and Ricardo Güiraldes' novel *Don Segundo Sombra*. His rustic traditions form part of Argentina's sophisticated folk art, with skilled craftspeople producing intricate silver gaucho knives and woven ponchos, while his image is endlessly reproduced – most amusingly in Florencio Molina Campos' caricatures.

These days, the gaucho-for-export is much easier to spot than the real deal, especially in folkloric shows at many *estancias*. But the gaucho's ancestors can be found on cattle farms throughout the pampas, riding over the plains in their dusty *boinas* (a kind of beret) and *bombachas* (riding pants). And on special occasions, such as the Día de la Tradición (see p113) they sport their best horse gear and show off their riding skills.

Estancia La Cinacina ESTANCIA \$\$\$
 (☎)452045; www.lacinacina.com.ar; B Mitre 9; día de campo AR\$290, r AR\$870-970; (☎) On the edge of town, this touristy *estancia* offers comfortable lodgings in a pretty park setting. Daytrips include folk shows and feats of horsemanship.

La Porteña ESTANCIA \$\$\$
 (☎)in Buenos Aires 15-5626-7347; www.laportenia.deareco.com; Ruta 8, Km 110; día de campo AR\$400, s/d from AR\$900/1200; (☎) Lovely grounds and historic location – this is where Ricardo Güiraldes wrote his gaucho epic *Don Segundo Sombra*. Good but not luxurious facilities and plentiful food; polo lessons available.

El Ombú ESTANCIA \$\$\$
 (☎)02326-492080; www.estanciaelombu.com; RP 31, cuartel VI, Villa Lia; día de campo AR\$320, s/d AR\$940/1480; (☎) This historic, 300-hectare working *estancia* is located about 20km from Areco. You can watch and even take part in managing cattle herds – or play golf and tennis at a nearby country club.

Eating

Almacén Ramos Generales ARGENTINE \$\$
 (Zapiola 143; mains AR\$25-60; ☎lunch & dinner) Come to this traditional, local mainstay if you want an old-time atmosphere in which to eat fish, meat or pasta dishes.

La Esquina de Merti ARGENTINE \$
 (Ruiz de Arellano 147; mains AR\$30-46; ☎breakfast, lunch & dinner) Right on the plaza is this cafe-restaurant with great old feel. Typical *par-rilla* (mixed grill) is on offer, but there are also *milanesas* (breaded cutlets), pasta and some finer dishes too. Cash discount.

Puesto La Lechuzca PARRILLA \$\$
 (Costanera Aquiles; mains AR\$30-60; ☎lunch & dinner Sat, lunch Sun) Best on a warm day, when you can enjoy a lunch of empanadas or barbecued beef under the trees near the river. Live guitar music on Saturday nights; open weekends only.

Shopping

San Antonio de Areco's artisans are known throughout the country. *Mate* paraphernalia, *rastras* (silver-studded belts) and *facónes* (gaucho long-bladed knives), produced by skilled silversmiths, are the most typical items. The tourist office has an extensive list of artists and their trades.

If you're looking for a gift of artisanal chocolates or *alfajores* (cookie-type sandwiches), try **La Olla de Cobre** (☎)453105; Matheu 433; ☎10am-1pm & 3-7:30pm Wed-Mon). You can sit down for a coffee or drinking chocolate as well.

Information

There are a few banks with ATMs along Alsina.

Post office (cnr Alvear & Av Del Valle)

Tourist office (☎)453165; cnr E Zerbóni & Ruiz de Arellano; ☎9:30am-7pm Mon-Fri, 8am-8pm Sat & Sun)

Getting There & Away

General Belgrano and Chevallier run frequent buses from Buenos Aires to Areco (AR\$35-40, two hours). A few long-distance services are available.

SOUTHERN PAMPAS

Spreading out from the capital, the pampas region extends south beyond the borders of Buenos Aires province and west into the province of La Pampa.

In the southern part of Buenos Aires province, the endlessly flat plain is punctuated by sierras, or hills. The Sierras de Tandil are ancient mountain ranges, worn to soft, low summits with heights that barely reach 500m. A little to the west, Sierra de la Ventana's jagged peaks rise to 1300m, attracting hikers and climbers.

Further west again, in the province of La Pampa, are the modest granite boulders of Parque Nacional Lihué Calel.

The hillside towns of Tandil and Sierra de la Ventana offer outdoor activities and a relaxing country atmosphere, while La Pampa's provincial capital of Santa Rosa is a decent resting point for overland travelers on their way west or south.

Tandil

(☎)249 / POP 124,000

Pretty Tandil sits at the northern edge of the Sierras de Tandil, a 2.5-million-year-old mountain range worn down to gentle, grassy peaks and rocky outcroppings – perfect for rock climbing and mountain biking. It exudes a rare combination of laid-back country charm with the energy of a thriving regional city. The town center is leafy and relaxed, with many places observing the afternoon siesta. Later in the evening, however, locals crowd the squares and streets, shopping and partaking in the city's cultural offerings. On a side note, Tandil is known for nurturing a disproportionate number of Argentina's tennis stars – the latest of whom is Juan Martín del Potro.

The town arose from Fuerte Independencia, a military outpost established in 1823. In the early 1870s, it was the scene of one of the province's most remarkable battles, when renegade gauchos gathered in the hills before going on a murderous rampage against landowners and recent immigrants. Eventually the immigrants prevailed, and the culinary skills they brought from Europe have made the area an important producer of specialty foods. Today, Tandil is famous for its cheeses and cured meats, which can be sampled in eateries and stores throughout town.

Sights

Tandil's museums include the historical **Museo Tradicionalista Fuerte Independencia** (☎)4435573; 4 de Abril 845; admission AR\$10; ☎2:30-6:30pm Tue-Sun Mar-Nov, 4-8pm Tue-Sun Dec-Feb), which exhibits collections on the

Staying on an Estancia

One of the best ways to enjoy the open spaces of the pampas is to visit an *estancia* (ranch). Argentina's late-19th-century belle époque saw wealthy families adorn their ranches with lavish homes and gardens.

Those glorious days being long gone, many of these establishments are now open to tourists. The *día de campo* – or 'day in the country' – usually includes a huge *asado* (barbecue grill) with drinks, a tour of the historic home and use of the property's horses, bicycles and swimming pool. Some places offer a *show gauchesco* (gaucho show), featuring folk dances and feats of horsemanship, while others host polo matches. *Estancias* are a sustainable tourism option, helping to preserve part of the country's past while providing an impressive guest-to-tree ratio. Most offer overnight stays, which include meals and activities.

ESTANCIA OPTIONS

All within a few hours of Buenos Aires:

» **Los Dos Hermanos** (☎ 4723-2880; www.estancialosdoshermanos.com) Best for horseback riding.

» **Juan Gerónimo** (☎ 02221-481414; www.juangeronimo.com.ar) The place for nature-lovers.

» **La Oriental** (☎ 02362-15-640866; www.estancia-laoriental.com) Lovely house and setting.

» **La Candelaria** (☎ 02227-424404; www.estanciacandelaria.com) Extravagant French-style castle.

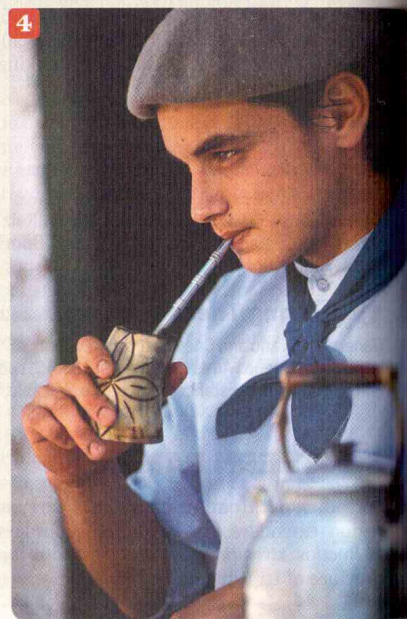
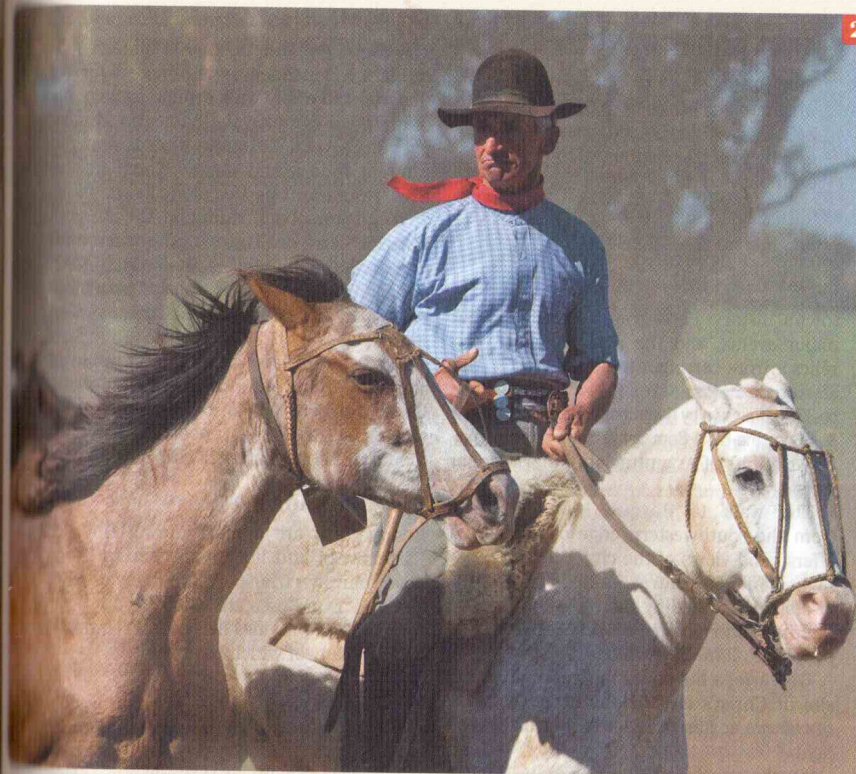
» **La Margarita** (☎ 4951-0638; www.estancialamargarita.com) Unique, 'self-catering' option.

» **Guapa Polo** (☎ 15-5111-8214; www.guapapolo.com.ar) Learn to play polo.

For other areas, see p114, p428 and p284.

Clockwise from top left

1. Asado (barbecue grill) 2. Gaucho 3. Musicians playing tango 4. Drinking mate



AREA CODE CHANGE

Tandil is due to get a new area code, which would change from 02293 to 249. A '4' will also be added to the beginning of every telephone number. For example:

old number 02293-123456

new number 249-412-3456

town's history. Photographs commemorate major events, and the place is filled with relics – from carriages to ladies' gloves. The **Museo de Bellas Artes** (☎4432067; Chacabuco 353; admission by donation; ☎8:30am-12:30pm & 4-8pm Tue-Fri, 4-8pm Sat & Sun) has temporary exhibits of Argentine and international artists.

The walk to **Parque Independencia** from the southwestern edge of downtown offers good views of the city, particularly at night, while the central **Plaza de Independencia**, surrounded by the typical municipal buildings and a church, is where the townspeople stroll in the evenings.

Calvario, a hill ostensibly resembling the site of Christ's crucifixion, attracts masses of visitors at Easter, when a passion play is held.

At the north edge of town the Piedra Movediza (a 300-ton 'rocking stone') teetered precariously atop **Cerro La Movediza** for many years before finally falling in 1912. A 'replica' nonmoving stone was built in 2007. Take bus 503 (blue).

For more good views, head 4.5km west of town to **Cerro El Centinela** (admission AR\$30; ☎11am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10:30am-6:30pm Sat & Sun), a hilltop with two restaurants plus a ski-lift-type ride. Open only weekends outside warm months; a taxi here costs AR\$20.

The **Reserva Natural Sierra del Tigre** (admission AR\$14; ☎9am-7pm in summer, till 5:30pm in winter, closed Wed & rainy days) is 6km south of town, at the end of Calle Suiz, off Av Don Bosco. The rocky hills are fun to climb, and in spring the reserve is filled with fragrant wild flowers. The peaks offer views of the town and local farms. A somewhat incongruous collection of animals – llamas and donkeys among them – have free run of the park, while their natural predator, the puma, is sadly caged. Taxis here cost around AR\$25 one way; arrange pickup for a return ride.

Activities

The **Dique del Fuerte**, only 12 blocks south of Plaza Independencia, is a huge reservoir that you can easily walk around in a couple of hours. In summer, the Balneario Municipal runs several **swimming pools** and you can rent **canoes** and **kayaks**. There are also a few restaurants nestled along its shoreline.

To go horseback riding in the Reserva Natural Sierra del Tigre or other surrounding areas, call **Gabriel Barletta** (☎442-47725, 02293-15-4509609; cabalgatasbarletta@yahoo.com.ar). For bike rentals, contact **Sergio** (☎445-2454, 02293-15-4647234).

Several tour agencies offer a range of activities around the town and the sierras. **Chao Tandil** (☎443-2542; www.chaotandil.com.ar) has trekking, canoeing, rappelling, mountain biking and rock climbing.

Sleeping

Reservations are a must during summer, Easter week and holiday weekends. If you have your own transport, the many cabañas along Av Don Bosco are a good option – the tourist office provides lists of fully equipped cabins, many of which have pools.

TOP CHOICE Lo de Titi

GUESTHOUSE \$\$
(☎442-0926; www.lodetiti.com.ar; Lobería 1050; s/d AR\$370/490; ☎☎☎) Just four fine, big rooms are available at this awesome place. There's a huge grassy garden, colorful eclectic decor and great common room with kitchen use. Prices drop outside summer.

Belgrano 39 B&B

B&B \$\$
(☎442-6989, 02293-15-607076; hutton@speedy.com.ar; Belgrano 39; s/d AR\$200/300; ☎☎) There are just two rooms at this peaceful B&B, both comfortable doubles, plus a large lovely garden with pool. Run by a one-of-a-kind British woman; reservations necessary.

Las Acacias

GUESTHOUSE \$\$
(☎442-3373; www.posadadasacacias.com.ar; Brasil 642; s/d AR\$380/440; ☎☎☎) Located in an old dairy, this wonderful place has nine elegant rooms set around covered hallways and gardens. Rustic atmosphere and tasteful decor; prices drop outside summer.

Estancia Ave Maria

ESTANCIA \$\$
(☎442-2843; www.avemariatandil.com.ar; s/d AR\$735/905 Mon-Thu, AR\$935/1025 Fri-Sun; ☎☎☎) This historic and beautiful 300-hectare *estancia* offers big rooms with views of the hills, and comfortable common areas.

Prices include breakfast and dinner, plus activities such as horseback rides. It's located 9km west of town.

Hotel Cristal

HOTEL \$
(☎444-3970; hotelcristal_tandil@yahoo.com.ar; Gral Rodríguez 871; s/d AR\$145/205; ☎☎) A basic budget hotel, with a sunny garden where guests can enjoy breakfast.

Casa Chango

HOSTEL \$
(☎442-2260; www.casa-chango.com.ar; 25 de Mayo 451; dm AR\$75, r AR\$210-300; ☎☎) Passable hostel in a rambling old building with old tiles, crumbling patios and a nice back garden. Most dorms are six to eight beds; avoid the one with 18. Private rooms are tiny, but there's one good-sized room with private bathroom.

Eating

TOP CHOICE Epoca de Quesos

ARGENTINE \$\$
(cnr San Martín & 14 de Julio; mains AR\$30-60; ☎9am-11pm) Stuffed with tourists on a busy weekend, Epoca de Quesos sells over 40 local cheeses and dozens of cured meats, which you can sample. Or snag a table in the pleasant garden out back and order a sampler plate with specialty beer to match. Regular main dishes too.

Tierra de Azafranes

INTERNATIONAL \$\$
(☎443-6800; cnr San Martín & Av Santamarina; mains AR\$35-85; ☎lunch & dinner Wed-Mon) This hip and smartly decorated restaurant is known for its fish, pastas, risottos and paella. Get the seafood stew on Wednesday night.

Benevento

ITALIAN \$
(cnr San Martín & L N Alem; pasta AR\$31-45; ☎lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) This restaurant does only pasta, and does it very well – it's all homemade and deliciously fresh. Try the *tallarines* (fettuccine) with smoked ham, asparagus and vodka cream. Discount on takeout.

Carajo

PARRILLA \$\$
(cnr Saavedra Lamas & García; mains AR\$50-70; ☎lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) With a great outdoor terrace overlooking the Dique del Fuerte, this *parrilla* is unbeatable on a warm sunny day. Closed Sunday night outside the warm months.

Also recommended:

Q'Tupé

INTERNATIONAL \$\$
(Av Brasil 184; mains AR\$30-65; ☎lunch & dinner) Delicious gourmet salads, sandwiches and specialty dishes.

Aquí No Es

INTERNATIONAL \$\$
(Chile 735; mains AR\$40-70; ☎breakfast, lunch & dinner) Bohemian food, artsy vibe, casual garden.

Drinking

For a small town, Tandil has several good bars.

Antares

BAR
(9 de Julio 758; ☎6pm-late) One of Antares many branches, it sports the typical Antares look – an attractive, modern restaurant-bar with just-for-looks copper tap cylinders behind the bar. Live music Thursday to Sunday; closed Monday.

Bar Tolomé

BAR
(cnr Gral Rodríguez & Bmé Mitre; ☎7pm-late) Dead midweek and lively on weekends (when there's occasional live music), this relaxed bar serves pizzas and sandwiches when a beer's not enough.

Antique Bistro

BAR
(Gral Rodríguez 687; ☎8am-late) A sophisticated mood prevails at this tiny old-fashioned piano bar, where live folk and tango bands perform from Wednesday to Saturday nights.

Shopping

Talabartería Carlos A Berruti

SOUVENIRS
(Gral Rodríguez 787; ☎9:15am-1pm & 4:30-8:30pm Mon-Sat) Especially good for leather, this store also stocks an assortment of *mates*, knives, silverwork and ponchos.

Almacén Serrano

FOOD
(☎444-8102; cnr Av Avellaneda & Gral Rodríguez; ☎9am-1pm & 4:30-9pm Mon-Thu, 9am-9pm Fri & Sat, 10am-9pm Sun) Sells cheese, salamis and hams from the region, as well as locally made beers and sweets.

Information

There are plenty of banks with ATMs in the center.

Post office (Gral Pinto 621)

Tourist office (☎444-8698; Rodríguez 445; ☎9am-8pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun)

Tourist office (☎443-2225; www.tandil.gov.ar; Av Com Espora 1120; ☎9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun) On the northern edge of town. There's another **tourist office** at the bus terminal.

Getting There & Away

Tandil's bus terminal is within walking distance of its town center, if you don't mind walking 12 blocks. Otherwise taxis will cost about AR\$12.

BUSES FROM TANDIL

DESTINATION	COST (ARS)	DURATION (HR)
Buenos Aires	120-140	5½
Córdoba	310-350	16
Mar del Plata	55	3
Mendoza	375-450	16
Necochea	45	3

Trains from Buenos Aires' Constitución station arrive in Tandil on Friday and head back on Sunday, but double check as service can be suspended.

i Getting Around

Tandil's excellent public transportation system reaches every important sight. Bus 500 (yellow) goes to Dique del Fuerte, bus 501 (red) goes to the bus terminal, and bus 503 (blue) goes to Cerro La Movediza, the university and the bus terminal.

Sierra de la Ventana

📍0291 / POP 5000

Sierra de la Ventana's main attraction is the wealth of outdoor activity it offers: hiking up nearby peaks, trout fishing and bathing in the streams and pools, riding on horse or bicycle through the hills, and climbing or rappelling among the rocks. Weekends fill with families from around the province coming to enjoy the picturesque hills.

The town is divided into two sections by Río Sauce Grande; Villa Tivoli has most of the services, while Villa Arcadia is residential. There's only one main street, and afternoons tend to be quiet as folks take a siesta break.

🏃 Activities

Lots of outdoor pursuits are on offer in this region, and you can tackle most on your own. For hiking guides try **Luan & Ventur** (📍0291-15-416-0931; luan_ventur@hotmail.com), which goes to Garganta del Diablo (see p121), the only way to explore that gorge. It also organizes rappelling, horseback riding and other tours.

Sergio Rodriguez (📍491-5355; www.sergio.rodrigueztur.com.ar; cnr Av San Martín & Iguazú), also known as GeoTur, does tours to a nearby winery and an *estancia*.

For bike rentals head to **El Tornillo** (📍0291-15-431-1812; Roca 142; 🕒10am-7pm, closed in afternoons during hot weather). The river area behind Hotel Aihuen is popular for splashing about, and beyond is a hill to climb.

🛏 Sleeping

Book ahead in summer and during long weekends. The tourist office has a list of *cabañas* (cabins).

La Casa de Juani

HOSTEL \$

(📍0291-15-416-0931; hostellacasadejuani@hotmail.com; Camino de las Carretas s/n; dm AR\$70, r AR\$160; 🕒📶) Next to fields on the edge of town is this tiny but beautiful hostel with just one private room and one four-bed dorm (camping and *cabañas* coming). Bike rentals available; it's a 10-minute dusty walk from the YPF gas station.

Hotel Atero

HOTEL \$\$

(📍491-5002; cnr Av San Martín & Güemes; s/d AR\$300; 📶📶) Comfortable and homey rooms, some with balconies overlooking the street, make this a good midrange choice. It's right in the middle of town, and has a restaurant.

Aihuen Hotel

HOTEL \$

(📍491-5074; www.com-tur.com.ar/alihuen; cnr Tornquist & Frontini; s/d AR\$100/200; 📶📶) About four blocks from the main drag, near the river, is this charmingly old-style hotel on grassy grounds. It's hardly luxurious, with creaky wood floors and simple furnishings, but there's certainly some atmosphere. A nearby building has more modern rooms.

Hostería Maiten

HOSPEDAJE \$

(📍491-5073; hosteriamaiten@yahoo.com.ar; Iguazú 93; r AR\$220; 📶) Sixteen very basic but clean rooms with open-shower bathrooms cluster around a leafy garden patio at this central, friendly and family-run place. Prices drop outside January/February.

Camping El Paraíso

CAMPGROUND \$

(📍0291-15-407-4530; camping_elparaiso@yahoo.com.ar; Los Tilos 150; campsites per person AR\$22, *cabañas* from AR\$80) This decent campground is pretty central, with dusty shady sites and various services. Small *cabañas* with bunks and outside baths are available. It's 2½ blocks from the main street.

🍴 Eating

Some restaurants close one or more days per week outside the December to March summer months.

El Ceibo

ARGENTINE \$\$

(📍491-5173; Calle Sauce Grande; mains AR\$40-70; 🕒📶) lunch & dinner Wed-Mon) Upscale restaurant specializing in regional dishes such as rabbit, venison, trout and boar. Find it across the river towards Villa Arcadia; it's at the Hotel El Ceibo. From May to mid-December the restaurant is only open Thursday to Sunday.

Sol y Luna

ARGENTINE \$\$

(📍491-5316; Av San Martín 658; mains AR\$35-60; 🕒📶) lunch & dinner) An attractive place serving everything from homemade pastas and pizzas to *parrilla* and fresh trout. Open in high season only.

Parrilla Rali-Hué

PARRILLA \$\$

(📍491-5220; San Martín 307; mains AR\$30-50; 🕒📶) lunch & dinner) It's beef only at this casual joint, where locals flock to dine on the *parrillada* for two – good value at AR\$90.

i Information

Banco Provincia (San Martín 260) The town's only bank; it has ATMs.

Post office (cnr Av Roca & Alberdi)

Tourist office (📍491-5303; 🕒8am-8pm) Across the tracks from the train station.

i Getting There & Around

Condor Estrella (📍491-5091) buses to Buenos Aires (AR\$180, eight hours, six times weekly) and Bahía Blanca (AR\$35, two hours, twice daily) leave from a small office on Av San Martín, a block from the YPF gas station. There are more services to Bahía Blanca with local *combi* (long-distance van) companies such as **Expreso Cabildo** (📍491-5247; cnr San Martín & Iguazú in remise office) and **Norte Bus** (📍0291-15-468-5101, San Martín 155). Norte Bus provides door-to-door service and costs AR\$45.

There are several trains per week from Buenos Aires (AR\$37-60); some arrive at Tornquist, 48km away.

Transporte Silver (📍491-5383; Av San Martín 156) runs a door-to-door service between Sierra de la Ventana and Tornquist (AR\$16.50, one hour), stopping at Villa Ventana (AR\$10, 25 minutes) and Parque Provincial Ernesto Tornquist (AR\$14, 40 minutes). The minibuses run two or three times daily (more in summer, December to March).

Parque Provincial Ernesto Tornquist

This 67-sq-km **park** (📍491-0039; admission AR\$10; 🕒8am-5pm Dec-Mar, 9am-5pm Apr-Nov), 22km from Sierra de la Ventana, draws visitors from throughout the province. There are two entrances. The first is 5km west of Villa Ventana and home to the **Centro de Visitantes**, which has a small display on local ecology. The main hike here is **Cerro Bahía Blanca** (three hours roundtrip), offering great views. There are also **Cuevas con Pinturas Repustres**, or cave paintings, but you can only visit these with a guided tour by Luan & Ventur (p120).

The park's highlight, however, is at its other entrance, 3km further west. The five-hour (round-trip) hike to 1150m **Cerro de la Ventana** leads to a window-shaped rock formation near its peak. The climb offers dramatic views of surrounding hills and the distant pampas. Register with rangers before 11am at the trailhead, and take plenty of water and sun protection.

If you don't have the energy, there are shorter destinations such as **Piletones** (2½ hours round-trip) and **Garganta Olvidada** (one hour round-trip). To visit the gorge and waterfall pool at **Garganta del Diablo** (six hours round-trip), you must go with a tour company, (p120).

Transportes Silver minibuses from Sierra de la Ventana (AR\$14, 40 minutes) and Villa Ventana (AR\$8, 15 minutes) head to the park two or three times daily (more in summer). For better timing to catch the park opening, you can also check Condor Estrella's morning bus schedule to Bahía Blanca. Remises to the park cost AR\$75 to AR\$85.

For accommodation options near the park, see the boxed text p122 or check with Sierra de la Ventana's tourist office.

Santa Rosa

📍02954 / POP 120,000

About 600km from Buenos Aires – and a long way from pretty much anywhere else – Santa Rosa is unlikely to be of interest unless you find yourself traveling overland, in which case it's a convenient stopping point and transport hub. It's a pleasant enough place, however, with a small-town feel, friendly people and busy plaza area.

VILLA VENTANA

Just 17km northwest of Sierra de la Ventana is the peaceful village of Villa Ventana. There's nothing much to do here except wander the dusty streets, which meander through pretty residential neighborhoods full of pine trees, and investigate the ruins of South America's first casino (by guided tour only; see the tourist office). Villa Ventana is also a closer base than Sierra de la Ventana from which to visit Parque Provincial Ernesto Tornquist.

There are several places to stay, though none are budget. **Cabañas La Ponderosa** (☎491-5491; www.laponderosacabañas.com.ar; cnr Cruz del Sur & Hornero; cabañas from AR\$240) near the entrance to town, has good-sized, homey and comfortable wood cabañas, some with loft and all with kitchenette. And for something special there's **Posada Agua Pampas** (☎491-0210; www.aguapampas.com.ar; cnr Calle Las Piedras btw Hornero & Canario; r from AR\$470; 🍷🍷🍷), with gorgeous rooms built from local stone and recycled wood, right down to the hollow-log bathtubs. Prices fall during weekdays and from April to mid-December; cash discount.

Get to Villa Ventana with Transportes Silver minibuses (AR\$10, 20 minutes), which leave from Sierra de la Ventana three to five times daily (depending on the season); remises cost AR\$45. Bahía Blanca buses can also stop near the entrance to town. The **Tourist office** (☎491-0095) is located at the town's entrance.

Sights & Activities

FREE Museo Provincial de Historia Natural (Quintana 116; admission free; 🕒variable) was being remodelled at research time, but will likely include a bird taxidermy collection, local dinosaur fossil discoveries and even live snakes.

Art lovers can visit **Museo Provincial de Artes** (☎427332; cnr 9 de Julio & Villegas; admission free; 🕒8am-8pm Mon-Fri, 6-9:30pm Sat & Sun), which features several rooms showcasing temporary exhibitions; check out the tree growing inside.

Laguna Don Tomás, 1km west of the city center, is the place for locals to sail, swim, play sports or just stroll.

Sleeping & Eating

Hotel Calfucurá HOTEL \$\$
(☎433303; www.hotelcalfucura.com; San Martín 695; s/d AR\$285/450; 🍷🍷🍷) Santa Rosa's best hotel, with modern atmosphere, handy location near the bus terminal and very comfortable carpeted rooms. In summer, worth it for the pool.

Residencial Atuel HOTEL \$
(☎422597; www.atuel.aehglp.org.ar; Luro 356; s/d AR\$100/170; 🍷) Just steps from the bus terminal, this friendly place has worn but tidy rooms with cable TV. It's certainly good enough for one night.

Camping Municipal Don Tomás

CAMPGROUND \$
(☎434568; Av Uruguay; campsites per person AR\$10, with car AR\$18) Basic, grassy sites with picnic tables and little privacy. From the bus terminal, take the 'circular' bus (taxis AR\$25). It's at the west end of Av Uruguay. Summer only.

La Recova ARGENTINE \$\$
(cnr Yrigoyen & Avellaneda; meals AR\$30-70; 🕒7am-1:30am) Good for breakfast, this modern place right on Plaza San Martín does the whole *confitería* (cafe) thing to perfection. Also sandwiches, pizzas and meats.

Information

You'll find several ATMs in the city center.

Municipal tourist office (☎436555; Luro 365; 🕒7:30am-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm & 4-8pm Sat & Sun) At the bus terminal; don't confuse it with the nearby (and more visible) 24-hour bus information office.

Post office (Hilario Lagos 258)

Provincial tourist office (☎424404; www.turismola.pampa.gov.ar; cnr Luro & San Martín; 🕒7am-9pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm, 5-9pm Sat & Sun) Across from the bus terminal; longer hours in January/February.

Getting There & Away

Aerolíneas (☎427588, Pico 267) flies to Buenos Aires. The airport is 3km from downtown.

The **bus terminal** (Luro 365) is seven blocks from the plaza. Long-distance buses include Bahía Blanca (AR\$98, five hours), Neuquén (AR\$167, 7½ hours), Buenos Aires (AR\$215 to AR\$290, eight hours), Puerto Madryn (AR\$220, 10 hours), Mendoza (AR\$270 to AR\$320, 12 hours) and Bariloche (AR\$360 to AR\$410, 12 hours).

For car rentals there's **H&C Rent a Car** (☎02954-15-697755, cnr Independencia & San Marzo).

Reserva Provincial Parque Luro

☎02954
Home to a mix of introduced and native species, as well as over 150 species of birds, this 76-sq-km **reserve** (www.parqueluro.gov.ar; admission AR\$4; 🕒9am-8pm) is a peaceful place to spend time away from the city. Avoid Sundays if you don't like crowds, however, and bring water and sun protection in the baking summer.

At the turn of the 20th century a wealthy local, Doctor Pedro Luro, created Argentina's first hunting preserve here, importing exotic game species such as Red deer and European boar. He also built an enormous French-style

mansion to accommodate his European guests. As sport hunting fell out of vogue and the European aristocracy suffered the upheavals of WWI and the Great Depression, Luro went broke. The reserve was sold, then neglected, its animals escaping through the fence or falling victim to poachers.

Since its acquisition by the province in 1965, Parque Luro has served as a refuge for native species such puma and wild fox, along with exotic migratory birds including flamingo. One of the park's biggest draws, however, is during the fall mating season of the Red deer. In March and April the males bellow loudly (called 'la Brama') to attract female harems, while scuffling amongst themselves. There are guided visits to witness this spectacle.

Hourly tours of the **Castillo** (per person AR\$8), Luro's mansion, offer insight into the luxurious eccentricities that Argentine landowners could indulge. As the story goes, Luro was only able to obtain the gorgeous walnut fireplace by purchasing an entire Parisian restaurant. Besides the museum, there's a **Sala de Carruajes** – a collection of turn-of-the-century carriages.

HOME, HOME ON THE...FEEDLOT?

They've always been one of Argentina's biggest tourist attractions – those juicy, grass-fed steaks full of seriously beefy taste. But these days, this type of beef has nearly disappeared. Stuffing cattle into pens and feeding them grain is becoming a standard way of finishing them off. Today, over 80% of Argentina's cows slaughtered each year experience their last few months in a feedlot.

Carnivorism was not always mass produced in Argentina. The country's agriculturally rich and vast pampas plains were ideal grounds for raising beef. Up until 2001, around 90% of cattle ate only their natural food: grass. But in the last ten years, several developments have changed this. The price of agricultural crops such as soybeans, of which Argentina is one of the world's top producers, has skyrocketed, making it more lucrative to grow the legume than dedicate space to cattle. A severe drought in recent years dealt another blow to the beef industry – there just wasn't enough grass to feed the herds.

But perhaps the biggest factor detrimental to the grass-fed cattle has been government subsidies for feedlot development, with the intention of producing beef more quickly than before. It's less profitable to raise a fully grass-fed cow – which takes much longer to reach maturity – than a grain-fed one. And the Argentine government also passed legislation keeping beef prices artificially low within its borders, while at the same time using taxes to discourage cattle ranchers from making profits by exporting beef. So even more ranchers have turned pastureland into soy or corn rows to stay alive.

Very soon, practically all Argentine cattle will live out their last few months in dirt-floor corrals, limiting their movements and eating an un-cow-like diet of grains. They'll be shot full of immunizations and antibiotics, which are crucial to treating ailments brought on by these unnatural conditions. Their beef will be slightly less tasteful and nutritious, yet more tender – due to the lower percentage of muscle, plus higher fat. And the modern world of commercial beef production will finally have caught up to Argentina, wiping away a part of its history, reputation...and that famous Argentine pride.

The park's sights are all located around a 6km ring road; reach the **Centro de Interpretación** by following the road 2.2km from the entrance. The basic restaurant (per person AR\$30) and campsites (2415649; take food, though 500m further up there's a small store). And (2415649; from the road are nice **cabañas** (AR\$220) that sleep up to five. A few short narrow roads veer off the ring road.

Parque Luro is 35km south of the Dumascat. From the bus terminal, catch the bus, 25 minutes, bus to General Acha (AR\$8, dropped off at the four daily) and ask to be taken to the park entrance. Find out when a bus returns to Santa Rosa. Taxis cost AR\$100 each way (negotiate your return time), or you can rent a car in Santa Rosa.

Parque Nacional Lihué Calel

02952

In the local indigenous language of the huenche, Lihué Calel describes a series of small, isolated mountain ranges and valleys that create unique microclimates in a nearly featureless pampas landscape. This desert-like park is a haven for native cats such as puma and jagouarundi. You can spot armadillo, guanaco, mara (Patagonian hare) and vizcachas, while birdlife includes the rhea-like **ñandú** and many birds of prey such as the **carancho** (crested caracara).

Lihué Calel receives only about 400mm of rainfall per year, but sudden storms create brief waterfalls over granite boulders near the visitors center. Even when the sky is cloudless, the subterranean streams in the valleys nourish the **monte** (a scrub forest of plant species). Within the park's 10 sq km exist 345 species of plants, nearly half the total found in the entire province.

There are a few walks in the area, including the hour-long hike to the 589m peak **Cerro de la Sociedad Científica Argentina**; watch for flowering cacti such as **Trichocereus candicans** between boulders. From the summit, there are outstanding views of the entire sierra and surrounding marshes and salt lakes.

About 8km from the visitors center is **Viejo Casco**, the ruins of the old house of

former Estancia Santa María. It's also possible to make a 9km walking circuit via the **Valle de las Pinturas**, where there are some petroglyphs.

More information is available at the **visitors center**, where there's a small museum. Spring is the best time to visit the park, when flowers are blooming and the temperatures aren't too hot.

Sleeping

Near the visitors center is a comfortable and free campground with shade trees, firepits (bring wood), picnic tables, toilets and showers. Stock up on food before arriving; the nearest decent supplies are at the town of Puelches, 32km south.

The closest hotel is **ACA** (2436101; r AR\$140), on the highway 3km from the park (or 1.5km via a trail), with a handful of OK rooms and a restaurant. Otherwise you can try a *hospedaje* (family home) in Puelches; the provincial tourist office in Santa Rosa can arrange a stay.

Getting There & Away

Parque Nacional Lihué Calel is 220km southwest of Santa Rosa, and there are no direct buses to the park. Most south-bound buses (ie to Neuquén or Bariloche) can drop you off on the highway near the entrance, or snag the daily minibus that heads to Puelches (AR\$60, three hours). Check with the provincial tourist office for details.

Driving (rent a car in Santa Rosa) is the best way to visit the park.

ATLANTIC COAST

Argentines can justly claim Latin America's highest peak (Cerro Aconcagua), its widest avenue (Buenos Aires' 9 de Julio) and perhaps its prettiest capital, but its beaches aren't tropical paradises strewn with palm trees. There's no white sand here, the winds can be fierce and the water is cloudy rather than turquoise. Despite all this Argentina's beaches are hardly unpleasant places in summer, and each January and February they reliably attract tens of thousands of well-heeled *porteños* (residents of Buenos Aires) escaping the capital's unrelenting heat. In fact, so many people flock to the shore that at times you might have a hard time finding a free spot to spread your towel.

So if you don't mind the lively summer crowds, the Atlantic Coast offers a wonder-

ful escape. And if you want to avoid the summer crowds, simply visit in the shoulder months of December and March, when the weather is still warm enough to enjoy the beaches and their activities. In the dead of winter, however, coastal towns here take on an abandoned feel and the foul weather can become downright depressing. Mar de Plata is an exception – the coast's largest city offers something to do all year round.

Accommodation prices vary widely along the coast, depending on the season. They rise sharply from mid-December through February, when reservations are crucial (and a few places require minimum-nights stays). Prices then start declining in March but rise again during Easter, after which most places close down until November. At the places that do stay open, bargains can be found during these cooler months.

Prices and opening hours noted in this chapter are for the January to February high season. In other months, opening hours (especially at tourist offices and restaurants) are much shorter.

San Clemente del Tuyú

02252 / POP 13,000

With absolutely none of the glitz or glamour of the resorts down the coast, family-oriented San Clemente is a favorite for low-key beachgoers. The **tourist information office** (2423249; cnr Avs Costanera & 63; 8am-midnight) is across from the beach; there are plenty of restaurants on the main drag, Calle 1.

A few kilometers north of San Clemente del Tuyú are several protected areas, including **Reserva Natural Municipal Punta Rasa** (whose beach is popular with kiteboarders) and **Parque Nacional Campos del Tuyú** (home of the rare pampas deer).

For tamer wildlife there's **Mundo Marino** (www.mundomarino.com.ar; admission AR\$119; 10am-8pm), South America's largest marine park. Another attraction is the popular recreation center **Termas Marinas** (www.termasmarinas.com.ar; admission AR\$57; 10am-8pm), featuring mineral-rich thermal baths.

Sleeping

Brisas Marinas

HOTEL \$\$

(2522219; www.brisas-marinas.com.ar; Calle 13, No 50; r AR\$280-350; ☺) A reasonably attractive choice just steps from the beach, with simple, nice and clean rooms, some with balcony.

Hotel Top

125

HOTEL \$

(2522005; www.hoteltopsancllemente.com.ar; Av Costanera 1657; s/d AR\$120/240) Almost too good of a deal, with 23 small but tidy rooms with cable TV, and right on the beach.

Hotel 5 Avenue

HOTEL \$

(2421035; Calle 5, No 1561; s/d AR\$130/180) Just a block and a half from the beach, this friendly place offers worn budget rooms with tiny bathrooms.

Getting There & Away

The **bus terminal** (cnr Avs Talas and Naval) is about 25 blocks from the town center. There are local buses and taxis to the center. Frequent buses connect San Clemente to Buenos Aires (AR\$130, 4½ hours), Pinamar (AR\$30, 2½ hours) and also Mar del Plata (AR\$67, four hours).

Pinamar

02254 / POP 25,000

Located about 120km northeast of Mar del Plata, Pinamar's warm waters make a very popular destination for middle-class *porteños*. It's a busy place in summer, so if you're seeking a bit of tranquility, head to its southern and more residential neighborhoods of Ostende and Valeria, which are less conveniently located but offer more affordable sleeping options. Even further south is woody Cariló, Argentina's most exclusive resort and home to expensive houses, fashionable restaurants and sandy side roads.

Pinamar was founded and designed in 1944 by architect Jorge Bunge, who figured out how to stabilize the shifting dunes by planting pines, acacias and pampas grass. It was once the refuge for the country's upper echelons, but is now somewhat less exclusive and more laid-back.

Pinamar's film festival, **Pantalla Pinamar** (www.pantallapinamar.com), takes place in March and there are concerts and parties on the beach around New Year.

Activities

The main activity in Pinamar is simply relaxing and socializing on the beach, which stretches all the way from north of the town down to Cariló. But the area also offers a wealth of outdoor activities, from windsurfing and waterskiing to horseback riding and fishing. You can also ride bicycles in the wooded areas near the golf course, or through the leafy streets of nearby Cariló.

For bike rentals, try **Leo** (📞488855; Av Bunge 111; ☀️9am-8pm). If you want to learn how to kiteboard, go to Sport Beach, the last *balneario* located about 5km north of Av Bunge. There are many more options for activities – ask at the tourist office.

Sleeping

Reservations are a must in January, when some places have a week minimum stay.

PINAMAR

Hotel Las Calas

HOTEL \$\$\$

(📞405999; www.lascalashotel.com.ar; Av Bunge 560; r AR\$700; 🍷🍷) This boutique-style hotel has tasteful rooms with king-size beds – the bigger ones with a loft. There's also a small but great wood sundeck and games room. It's right on the main drag, in the middle of the bustle.

Hotel Mojomar

HOTEL \$\$\$

(📞407300; www.hotelmojomar.com.ar; Burriquetas 247; d from AR\$550; 🍷🍷) This upscale but not luxurious hotel is nicely located three blocks off Av Bunge, but a block from the beach. There's a beautiful lobby and small, comfortable rooms, some with sea view; go for a suite if you need more space.

Hotel Trinidad

HOTEL \$\$

(📞488983; hoteltrinidad@telpin.com.ar; Del Cangrejo 1370; r AR\$300; 🍷) Right near Hospedaje Acacia and a good budget option in Pinamar, this hotel has 26 pleasant rooms with small bathrooms and cable TV.

Hotel La Gaviota

HOTEL \$\$

(📞482079; Del Cangrejo 1332; d AR\$300) Twenty tidy, almost pretty rooms are available at this slightly unusual hotel. Many rooms surround a cute back patio dotted with flowers; no breakfast.

Hospedaje Acacia

HOSPEDAJE \$

(📞485175; Del Cangrejo 1358; d AR\$200) Good basic cheapie with old mattresses, a few blocks from Pinamar's tourist office and about a 15-minute walk to the beach. There's a little garden patio in back; no breakfast.

OSTENDE & VALERIA

Pinamar has little budget accommodation – it might be worth heading to Ostende and Valeria, a few kilometers away, where you'll find low-key lodgings close to the beach.

To get here from Pinamar's bus station you can always taxi, but you can also take the 'Montemar' bus for AR\$3; it stops a

block away from Hosteria Candela (at Valeria's roundabout) and passes right by Camping Saint Tropez, which is a block from Albergue Bruno Valente.

Hosteria Candela

HOSTERIA \$\$

(📞486788; Jorge 434, Valeria; r AR\$300; 🍷) Just two blocks from the beach at Valeria is this good family-run place with eight clean, spacious rooms and a nice grassy garden.

Camping Saint Tropez

CAMPGROUND \$

(📞482498; www.sainttropezpinamar.com.ar; Quintana 178, Ostende; campsite for 2 persons with tent AR\$90; ☀️Oct-Apr) Due to its location near the beach, this small site fills up in summer. Apartments also available (from AR\$300).

Albergue Bruno Valente

HOSTEL \$

(📞402783; info@aaaj.org.ar; cnr Mitre & Nuestras Malvinas, Ostende; dm AR\$70) In Ostende, about 10 blocks south of Pinamar's center, is this seriously ugly hostel – but perhaps the remodel will change this. It's just steps from the beach; look for it behind Hotel Soleado. Could be closed outside summer.

Eating

The beach is lined with restaurants serving beach grub like fried calamari and burgers.

Acqua & Farina

PIZZERIA \$\$

(cnr Cerezo & Boyero, Cariló; mains AR\$27-50; 🍷lunch & dinner) Head to Cariló for the best thin-crust pizza around, as well as fresh salads and homemade pastas. Located in Cariló plaza, the last stop for the local 'Montemar' bus.

Cantina Tulumei

SEAFOOD \$\$

(Bunge 64; mains AR\$40-80; 🍷lunch & dinner) A good place for reasonably priced, quality seafood. Fish is prepared in at least a dozen different sauces, or go for the shrimp omelette and octopus salad. Homemade pastas also available.

Tante

INTERNATIONAL \$\$\$

(De las Artes 35; mains AR\$60-80; 🍷breakfast, lunch & dinner) This classy restaurant, bar and tea room was the home of a well-known soprano who wowed the crowds in the '50s. Now it specializes in gourmet meat dishes and European specialties such as fondue, though it also serves homemade pasta and fish.

Information

Municipal tourist office (📞491680; cnr Av Bunge & Shaw; ☀️8am-9pm)

Post office (Jasón 524)

Getting There & Away

Pinamar's bus terminal is about eight blocks north of the town center, just off Av Bunge. Destinations include Buenos Aires (AR\$130, six hours), Mar del Plata (AR\$50, 2½ hours) and San Clemente del Tuyú (AR\$30, 2½ hours). There are frequent buses to nearby Villa Gesell (AR\$12, 30 to 45 minutes).

Trains may or may not be running from Buenos Aires Constitución train station to Pinamar's Estación Divisadero, about 2km north of town.

Villa Gesell

📞02255 / POP 32,000

Smaller and less flashy than its neighbors Pinamar and Mar del Plata, laid-back Villa Gesell is still a hit with the younger crowd. Uniquely for the coastal towns, it offers a wood-planked beach boardwalk, making walks along the sands much easier. It's also known for summer choral performances and rock and folk concerts, and there are plenty of outdoor activities to enjoy. The town is compact, with most services located on its main drag, Av 3, three blocks from the beach.

In the 1930s, merchant, inventor and nature lover Carlos Gesell designed this resort of zigzag streets, planting acacias, poplars, oaks and pines to stabilize the shifting dunes. Though he envisioned a town merging with the forest he had created, it wasn't long before high-rise vacation shares began their malignant growth and the trees started to disappear.

Sights & Activities

The **Muelle de Pesca** (Playa & Paseo 129), Gesell's 15m fishing pier, offers year-round fishing for mackerel, rays, shark and other marine species.

You can rent surf gear from **Windy** (📞474626; www.windyplayabar.com.ar; Paseo 104), down on the beachfront. For bicycle rentals try **Casa Macca** (📞468013; Av Buenos Aires btw Paseo 101 & Av 5). Surfing and horseback riding are other popular activities.

Aventura Faro Querandi (📞468989; cnr Av 3 & Paseo 132) runs four-hour tours in 4WD jeeps to a local lighthouse.

For a totally different atmosphere visit **Mar de las Pampas**, an exclusive woodsy neighborhood that's a 15-minute bus ride south from Villa Gesell's bus terminal. It has sandy streets, expensive lodging (rented only by the week in summer) and upscale services – all dropped into a pine forest. The beach here is less crowded, too. Beyond Mar

de las Pampas is **Mar Azul**, another (less exclusive) beach town.

There's a nightly **feria artesanal** (crafts fair; Av 3 btwn Paseos 112 & 113) from mid-December to mid-March. Expect lots of handmade jewelry, carved wood, paintings and the usual souvenirs.

Sleeping

Campgrounds charge around AR\$60 to AR\$80 per person per night. Most close at the end of March, but two at the southern end of town on Av 3 (at the beach) are open all year: **Autocamping Casablanca** (📞470771; www.autocampingcasablanca.com) and **Camping Monte Bubi** (📞470732; www.montebubi.com.ar). Both have lots of services and *cabaña*-style accommodations. The Mar Azul bus from the terminal goes right by.

Costa Bonita

HOSPEDAJE \$\$

(📞462457; www.gesellcostabonita.com.ar; Av 4, No 648; r AR\$390; 🍷) Twenty-two tastefully decorated rooms with high ceilings are available at this small, family-run guesthouse in a residential neighborhood near the center. Upstairs rooms have more light. There's also a tiny gravel patio area to hang out in.

Hotel Tamanacos

HOTEL \$\$\$

(📞468753; tamanacos@gesell.com.ar; cnr Paseo 103 & Av 1; s/d AR\$250/450; 🍷) One block from the beach, this cute hotel has some nice common areas, particularly the front deck. The 21 small, homey rooms have tiny baths, but with beach umbrellas provided you won't be in them most of the time.

Hotel Merimar

HOTEL \$\$

(📞462243; www.gesell.com.ar/hotelmerimar; cnr Paseo 107 & Playa; r AR\$460; 🍷) Rooms here have old carpets and outdated furniture, but if you score a beachfront room with balcony (reserve ahead, they're the same price!), the views are worth it. If you can't get a view, at least the breakfast salon has them, and you're still near the beach.

Residencial Viya

HOSPEDAJE \$\$

(📞462757; www.gesell.com.ar/viya; Av 5, No 582, btwn Paseos 105 & 106; d AR\$350) Rooms are simple, with open-shower bathrooms, but they're comfortable enough at this family-run *residencial* (budget hotel) on a quiet street. The best rooms open to the central leafy garden.

La Deseada Hostel

HOSTEL \$\$

(📞473276; www.ladeseadahostel.com.ar; cnr Av 6 & Paseo 119; dm AR\$150; 🍷🍷) Good-looking hostel

tucked away six blocks from the beach and a 15-minute walk from the center. Good common areas and grassy garden; dorms have eight beds. Much quieter outside summer, when prices fall and private rooms are available. Dog on premises.

Hospedaje Villa Gesell HOSPEDAJE \$
(☎466368; www.hospedajevillagesell.com.ar; Av 3, No 812; r AR\$300) You can't get more cheap or central than this family-run spot with 10 budget rooms, most around a little patio area. There's also a garden in back.

Eating

Las Margaritas ITALIAN \$\$
(☎456377; Av 2, No 484, btwn Paseos 104 & 105; mains AR\$40-60; ☺dinner) Charming cozy and quiet, this place serves excellent homemade pasta, including a shrimp and squid ink ravioli. The tiramisú is excellent. Reserve in summer.

La Delfina PARRILLA \$\$
(cnr Paseo 104 & Av 2; mains AR\$35-60; ☺lunch & dinner) A huge menu means there's something for everyone at this popular *parrilla*. If you need some extra protein, try the 'El Supremo' *bife de chorizo* – a steak that comes with two eggs and bacon. There's also a low-calorie section and everything in-between.

Sutton 212 ARGENTINE \$\$
(cnr Paseo 105 & Ave 2; mains AR\$40-60; ☺breakfast, lunch & dinner) This lively restaurant-bar serves dishes ranging from Mediterranean to Asian fusion, along with gourmet crepes, sushi and sandwiches. There's live bossa nova and jazz at dinner, then a DJ later in the evening, when the place becomes a happening bar.

La Pachamama ARGENTINE \$
(Av 2, No 411; empanadas AR\$4.50, pizzas AR\$22-30; ☺lunch & dinner) This casual eatery bakes up delicious Salta-style empanadas and fresh pizzas – perfect for a quick budget meal. Covered wood booths in front.

Information

Post office (cnr Av 3 & Paseo 108)

Tourist office (☎478042; Paseo 107 btwn Aves 2 & 3; ☺8am-8pm) Conveniently located in the center. Also at the bus terminal.

Getting There & Away

The **bus terminal** (cnr Av 3 & Paseo 140) is 30 blocks south of the town center; a local bus ride to the center takes 20 minutes.

Destinations include Buenos Aires (AR\$150, six hours), Mar del Plata (AR\$32, two hours) and Pinamar (AR\$8, 30 to 45 minutes). You can buy bus tickets in the town center at **Central de Pasajes** (☎472480; cnr Av 3 & Paseo 107), saving you a trip to the terminal.

Mar del Plata

☎0223 / POP 650,000

Four hundred kilometers from Buenos Aires lies Mar del Plata ('Mardel'), the premier Argentine beach destination for *porteños*. If you end up here on a summer weekend, you'll be guaranteed to say 'Wow, this beach is crowded.' There might a couple of places where you could get in a few swimming strokes without taking somebody's eye out, but mostly it's shoulder-to-shoulder, sun-frazzled bodies. After spending a few days on its comically packed sands, watching street performers on the beachside Plaza Colón or exploring the wonders of the port, however, you might get the sense of adoration that the country feels for this place.

During the week, and especially outside of summer, the crowds disperse, hotel prices drop and the place takes on a more relaxed feel. And if summer crowds don't appeal, visit in spring or autumn, when prices are lower and the area's natural attractions are easier to enjoy. After all, Mardel is a large city and has attractions other than its beach.

Rivadavia becomes a pedestrian street only during the summer months; San Martín is always pedestrian.

History

Europeans were slow to occupy this stretch of the coast, so Mardel was a late bloomer. Not until 1747 did Jesuit missionaries try to evangelize the southern pampas indigenous people; the only reminder of their efforts is a chapel replica near Laguna de los Padres.

More than a century later, Portuguese investors established El Puerto de Laguna de los Padres. Beset by economic problems in the 1860s, they sold out to Patricio Peralta Ramos, who founded Mar del Plata proper in 1874. Peralta Ramos helped develop the area as a commercial and industrial center, and later as a beach resort. By the turn of the century, many wealthy *porteño* families owned summer houses, some of which still grace Barrio Los Troncos.

Since the 1960s the 'Pearl of the Atlantic' has lost some of its exclusivity with the Argentine elite seeking refuge in resorts such

as nearby Pinamar or Punta del Este (Uruguay). Still, Mar del Plata remains the most thriving Argentine beach town.

Sights

Beaches

Mar del Plata's beaches are mostly safe and swimmable. Downtown fronts onto the most central beach, **Playa Bristol**, with its wharf and restaurant; the boardwalk here, next to the casino area, is always packed with activity. The next beach to the north is **Playa La Perla**, favored by a younger crowd and filled with *balnearios* (bathing resorts, or section of beach with services such as beach chairs and parasols). To the south of Punta Piedras (Torreón) are **Playa Varese** and **Cabo Corrientes**, a pair of small beaches that are protected by small rocky headlands.

South of these beaches, at the more fashionable end of town, lies **Playa Grande**, also crowded with *balnearios*. About 11km south of center, just past the port, you'll find the huge **Punta Mogotes** complex – slightly more relaxed and favored by families, who fill the *balnearios* to overflowing in January. This is also the location of **Playa Waikiki**, a popular spot for surfing.

Beyond the lighthouse is a less urbanized area. Though the beaches here are still filled with yet more *balnearios* in the summer, they're a quieter option. And for the adventurous, there's **Playa Escondida** (www.playaescondida.com.ar), some 25km south of

BEACHES

Mardel and possibly Argentina's only legal nude beach. Bus 221 gets you there.

Museums

Built in 1909 as the summer residence of a prominent Argentine family, the Villa Ortiz Basualdo is now the **Museo Municipal de Arte Juan Carlos Castagnino** (Av Colón 1189; admission AR\$8, Wed free; ☺5-10pm). Resembling a Loire Valley castle, its Belgian interior exhibits paintings, photographs and sculptures by Argentine artists.

In the Villa Emilio Mitre (1930), another former summer residence of the Argentine oligarchy, lies the **Museo Archivo Histórico Municipal Roberto T Barili** (Lamadrid 3870; admission AR\$5; ☺8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 5-9pm Sat & Sun). Inside is a small but good museum of Mardel's history, told through well-displayed relics such as 1800s clothing and photographs. Check out the view from the 3rd-floor tower.

Housing the most extensive seashell collection you're ever likely to see, the **Museo del Mar** (Av Colón 1114; admission AR\$30; ☺10am-11pm) exhibits more than 30,000 shells, representing 6000 species from around the world. The museum also contains a small tide pool and aquarium.

Kids and science fans might enjoy the **Museo Municipal de Ciencias Naturales** (Av Libertad 3099; admission AR\$5, Wed free; ☺10am-5:30pm), a small science museum with aquarium and dinosaur bones. In summer special exhibitions can skyrocket the admission fee and they're only open in the evenings.

WORTH A TRIP

MAR CHIQUITA

A humble and windy little gem, the beach-side village of Mar Chiquita is home to **Albúfera Mar Chiquita**, a 35km-long lagoon with huge biodiversity – over 220 bird and 55 fish species live within its waters. There's good fishing in the area, and the beach is popular for windsurfing and kiteboarders – or just hanging out for a bit.

A good and homey place to stay is **Hosteria Bariloche** (☎469-1254; mchpao@hotmail.com; cnr Beltrán & Echeverría; s/d from AR\$180/200; @) a friendly, family-run place with 10 rooms and apartments. They also rent-wind sports equipment and give lessons. Campers can head to **Camping Santa Rosa** (☎469-1300; cnr Rivera del Sol & playa; campsites for four people AR\$100).

The **visitors center** (☎469-1288; cnr Belgrano & Rivera del Sol; ☺8am-8pm) is at the beach; if it's not open, call nearby Santa Clara's **tourist office** (☎460-2433). It organizes tours around the lagoon (reserve ahead). Bring money – the closest ATM is 4km away in Mar de Cabo.

Mar Chiquita is 34km north of Mar del Plata. Rápido del Sud runs frequent buses that can drop you at the highway 2.5km outside Mar Chiquita (they don't enter town). Most No 221 local buses do enter town (double check with the driver) and run every two hours in summer to/from Mar del Plata.

Mar del Plata



Mar del Plata

Sights

- 1 Catedral de los Santos Pedro y Cecilia.....B3
- 2 Centro Cultural Villa Victoria.....A7
- 3 Museo Archivo Histórico Roberto T Barili.....A7
- 4 Museo del Mar.....D5
- 5 Museo Municipal de Arte Juan Carlos Castagnino.....D5
- 6 Museo Municipal de Ciencias Naturales.....B1
- 7 Torre Tanque.....D6

Activities, Courses & Tours

- 8 Bicerletería Madrid.....A3

Sleeping

- 9 Alta Esperanza Hostel.....C2
- 10 City Hotel.....B2
- 11 Etoile.....B3
- 12 Hostel del Mar.....D5
- 13 Hotel Sirenuse.....D5
- 14 La Pergola Hostel.....B1
- 15 Playa Vanese Inn.....D6
- 16 Villa Nuccia.....D5

Eating

- 17 El Jamón.....A3
- 18 El Palacio del Bife.....B3
- 19 Montecatini.....B2
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Puerto Mar del Plata

MAR DEL PLATA IS ONE OF THE COUNTRY'S MOST important fishing locations and seafood-processing centers, and its port area – located 10km south of the city center – is worth a visit.

At the entrance to the port, just off Av Martínez de Hoz, you'll see a large cluster of seafood restaurants surrounding a parking lot. This is the **Centro Comercial del Puerto**, and it's a good place to grab a bite to eat; just pick a place that looks busy.

You can also take your bus (see following) directly to the port's scenic and slightly touristy wharf, called the **Banquina de Pescadores**, which lies beyond the restaurant cluster – this saves you a 10-minute walk

through an ugly industrial area. This picturesque wharf is home to dozens of orange fishing boats and the fisherfolk who follow their routine here. You might see a sea lion's head poking out of the water; these animals have established a large colony – all male – nearby on the *escollera sur* (southern jetty).

To get to this jetty, tromp south of the wharf about a block or so (there is no real path) and go past the port's security entrance, then turn left onto the road. This is another ugly industrial area, but eventually becomes the more pleasant jetty that leads 2km out to sea. On the way you'll pass a graveyard of **ruined ships**, half-sunken and rusting in the sun, and are likely see the colony of male sea lions lazing on a beach or behind a section of chain link fence. And at the tip of the windy *escollera sur* is a restaurant, which offers nourishment, along with panoramic views of the city.

Local bus 511 goes all the way to the wharf from downtown; you'll need a magnetic card to board (see later under 'Getting Around'). Bus 221 only reaches the seafood restaurants at the port's entrance. A taxi costs AR\$50.

Centro Cultural

Villa Victoria

CULTURAL CENTER

(☎492-0569; Matheu 1851; admission AR\$8; ☀10am-1pm, 5-9pm in Jan & Feb, 2-8pm Wed-Mon from Mar-Dec) Victoria Ocampo, founder of the literary journal *Sur*, hosted literary salons with prominent intellectuals from around the world at this, her summer chalet. It's now a cultural center that features changing art and cultural exhibitions.

Catedral de los Santos Pedro y Cecilia

CATHEDRAL

FACING THE leafy Plaza San Martín, this neo-Gothic building features gorgeous stained glass, an impressive central chandelier from France, English tiled floors and occasional choral concerts.

FREE Torre Tanque

WATER TOWER

(☎451-4681; Falucho 995; admission free; ☀8am-4pm Mon-Fri) This interesting medieval water storage tower, atop Stella Maris hill, was finished in 1943 and is still functioning. It offers awesome views over Mar del Plata and further out to sea.

Aquarium Mar del Plata

AQUARIUM

(☎467-0700; www.aquariummardelplata.com; Av Martínez de Hoz 5600; adult/child 3-10yr AR\$98/70; ☀10am-8pm) Located 14km south

of the center, near the lighthouse, is Mar del Plata's aquarium. Animals on display include penguins, flamingos, crocodiles and lots of fish. There are sea-lion, dolphin and waterskiing shows, along with a cinema. You can also swim with sharks (among other watery creatures) and sit on the beach. Get here on bus 221 or 511.

Laguna de los Padres

A popular weekend destination for *marplatenses*, this lake offers a bucolic setting and a range of activities, including bird-watching, fishing, water sports, biking, hiking and rock climbing. The area was first settled in 1746 as a Jesuit Mission aimed at rounding up the nomadic tribes of the area – there's a replica of the original chapel by the lake's shore. You can camp near the lake, and there are good places to eat in the pleasant nearby town of Sierra de los Padres.

The lake is just 13km out of Mar del Plata along RN 226; the town is 4km further. Bus 277 (from Av Luro in Mar del Plata; buy a magnetic card first, see p135) goes to Sierra de los Padres, but it doesn't take the side road to the lake – you'll have to get off at the highway and walk a kilometer just to reach the shore, or double back from Sierra de los Padres in a *remise*.

Activities

Mar del Plata and its surrounds offer plenty of opportunity to enjoy outdoor activities and adventure sports.

Biking is a good, green way to get around town. The streets of Los Troncos are relatively calm and pleasant for cycling. Bicycles can

be rented from **Biciclería Madrid** (☎494-1932; Yrigoyen 2249).

Surf is best in March or April. **Kikiwai Surf School** (☎485-0669; www.kikiwaisurfclub.com.ar; Av Martínez de Hoz 4100), run by surf pioneer Daniel Gil, offers surfing classes and rents boards; find it at Waikiki beach (about 11km south of center).

As the sea lions attest, Mar del Plata is one of the best spots for fishing in Argentina. The rocky outcrop at **Cabo Corrientes**, just north of Playa Grande, is a good spot to try, as are the two breakwaters – **Escollera Norte** and **Escollera Sur** – at the port. Freshwater fishing is popular at Laguna de los Padres (see opposite), while **Mako Team** (☎493-5338; www.makoteam.com.ar) offers ocean fishing excursions.

The rocky cliffs by the sea and the hills of Sierra de los Padres make for excellent climbing and rappelling. **Acción Directa** (☎474-4520; www.acciondirecta.com.ar) runs a school – it also offers mountain biking, canoeing and overnight active camping trips.

Horseback riding and skydiving are possibilities – contact the tourist office for details.

Tours

Crucero Anamora CRUISE
(☎489-0310; www.cruceroanamora.com.ar) This 30m boat offers harbor tours several times daily in summer (AR\$79) and twice daily on weekends in winter from Dársena B at the port.

Municipal Tourist Office WALKING TOUR
(Bvd Marítimo) Conducts free organized tours (called 'Paseos Para Gente Inquieta')

LITERARY LADY OF LA PLATA

She was 'the most beautiful cow in the pampas' according to French novelist Pierre Drieu, and Jorge Luis Borges called her 'the most Argentine of women.' In the 1920s and 1930s, Victoria Ocampo gathered writers and intellectuals from around the globe to her home, Villa Victoria (p131), creating a formidable literary and artistic salon.

Ocampo never went to university, but her voracious appetite for knowledge and love of literature led her to become Argentina's leading lady of letters. She founded the literary magazine *Sur*, which introduced writers such as Virginia Woolf and TS Eliot to Argentine readers. She was also an inexhaustible traveler and a pioneering feminist, and was loathed for her lack of convention. A ferocious opponent of Peronism, chiefly because of Perón's interference with intellectual freedom, Ocampo was arrested at Villa Victoria at the age of 63. She entertained her fellow inmates by reading aloud and acting out scenes from novels and cinema.

If Victoria is remembered as a lively essayist and great patroness of writers, her younger sister, Silvina, was the literary talent, writing both short stories and poetry. Silvina won several literary prizes for her works, and in 1940 married Adolfo Bioy Casares, a famous Argentine writer and friend of Jorge Luis Borges.

of unusual city sights, such as an alfajor or textile factory – though they also go to the port and museums. Reserve ahead at the main tourist office (p135).

Festivals & Events

The city's **International Film Festival** (www.mardelplatafilmfest.com) takes place in November. Launched in 1950, it's South America's most important film festival.

In January Mar del Plata also celebrates **Fiesta Nacional del los Pescadores** (Fisherman's Festival), which sees locals cooking up seafood feasts, along with a traditional procession.

Another large celebration is February's **Fiesta Nacional del Mar** (National Sea Festival), which includes the election and coronation of a 'Sea Queen.'

Sleeping

Prices start climbing in November and December, are highest in January and February, then drop off in March. Reserve ahead during peak times. In the off-season some of Mar del Plata's accommodations close their doors.

Mar del Plata's crowded campgrounds are mostly south of town; the tourist office prints out information about their facilities.

TOP CHOICE El Aleph

Hotel Boutique BOULIQUE GUESTHOUSE \$\$\$
(☎451-4380; www.elalephmdq.com.ar; LN Alem 2542; r AR\$480-640; ☎☎☎☎) Most of the lovely rooms are set around covered wood walkways and a grassy garden with small pool, offering an upscale paradise. The feel is exclusive but relaxed, with afternoon tea and wine tastings on tap, and kitchen use available. Reservations necessary; no children under 12; cash payment only. Located a couple blocks south of Playa Varese.

TOP CHOICE Villa Nuccia

Guesthouse GUESTHOUSE \$\$\$
(☎451-6593; www.villanuccia.com.ar; Almirante Brown 1134; d AR\$690; ☎☎☎) This beautiful guesthouse is in a renovated house, and offers eight simple yet elegant and spacious rooms – a couple have balconies and most come with whirlpool tubs. There's a large green lawn out back with a swimming pool and Jacuzzi; afternoon tea service is offered. Run by a young, traveling Argentine couple.

Playa Varese Inn

HOSTERÍA \$\$\$
(☎451-1813; www.playavareseinn.com.ar; Gascón 715; r AR\$250; ☎☎) Fifteen simple, comfortable and good-sized rooms with concrete floors are on offer at this nice little *hostería*. It's just 1½ blocks from the beach and has cable TV. Reserve ahead; it's popular.

Hotel Sirenuse

HOTEL \$\$\$
(☎451-9580; www.hotelsirenuse.com.ar; Mendoza 2240; d AR\$330-430; ☎☎☎) A good choice just a few blocks from Playa Varese is this friendly, family-run place. All rooms have a warm and homey feel, with a European touch – not a surprise given that the owners are French-German-Argentine. Various languages spoken.

City Hotel

HOTEL \$\$\$
(☎495-3018; www.cityhotelmardelplata.com; Diagonal JB Alberdi 2561; d AR\$360-450) This large, worker-owned cooperative hotel has an old-school feel and delightful back garden. It's worth paying a bit extra for the 'superior' rooms – they're larger and their bathrooms come with bathtubs; the front ones have balconies. Two-room 'apartments' (no kitchen) available.

Etoile

HOTEL \$\$\$
(☎493-4968; www.hoteletoilemdq.com.ar; Santiago del Estero 1869; d AR\$400; ☎) Its central location, plus spacious carpeted rooms (some with long 'entry' space and sofa), make this place good value. Get a quieter room in back – they're still bright. Buffet breakfast.

Alta Esperanza Hostel

HOSTEL \$
(☎495-8650; www.altaesperanzahostel.com.ar; Av Peralta Ramos 1361; dm AR\$85-125, r AR\$320-350; ☎☎) Proud to be Mar del Plata's first waterfront hostel, and located in an historic, Normandy-style building. Offers six- to 12-bed dorms and a few private rooms, and best for non-party types – this is a place to relax. Try to reserve a sea-view room. Occasional art shows or cultural events are hosted here.

La Pergola Hostel

HOSTEL \$
(☎493-3695; www.lapergolahostel.com.ar; Yrigoyen 1093; dm AR\$70; ☎☎) A decent hostel in a cool old Tudor-like building. Some of the four- and eight-bed wood-floor dorms have balcony and partial sea views, and there's a great terrace with pergola. The dining/commonal/games area is in the cold basement, though. One private room in high season (AR\$250); dog on premises.

Hostel del Mar

HOSTEL \$

(☎486-3112; www.hosteldelmar.com.ar; Av Colón 1051; dm AR\$80-100; @☎) Here's a very casual, small hostel just 1½ blocks from the beach, with nice grassy back garden. Bathrooms can get tight when it's full. It's big on surfing, offering board rentals and lessons; bike rentals also available.

 **Eating**

Mar del Plata's numerous restaurants, pizzerias and snack bars often struggle to keep up with impatient crowds between December and March, and there are always long lines. For fresh seafood head south of town to the port, which has several restaurants cooking up the catch of the day.

 **Taberna Baska**

BASQUE \$\$\$

(☎480-0209; 12 de Octubre 3301; mains AR\$35-90; ☎lunch & dinner) From the port is this renowned Basque restaurant, running for over 50 years. It has old-school atmosphere and serves up delicious dishes like garlic shrimp, mixed seafood stews, fish in seven kinds of sauce, and *bacalao* (dried, salted cod).

Tisiano

ITALIAN \$\$\$

(San Lorenzo 1332; mains AR\$50-70; ☎lunch & dinner) Locally recommended, fine Italian restaurant – start with the salmon carpaccio and follow up with the chicken and spinach crepes, squash *sorrentinos* (large, round filled pastas) or linguini with shrimp. Seven kinds of gourmet salads as well.

El Palacio del Bife

PARRILLA \$\$\$

(Córdoba 1857; mains AR\$60-80; ☎lunch & dinner) A recommended, classy *parrilla* with a massive menu. Come hungry and come wanting meat, although the homemade pastas are also worth a try. There's also seafood, *milanesas* (breaded cutlets) and rice dishes. Not cheap, but portions are large. Takeout food 20% off.

Viento en Popa

SEAFOOD \$\$\$

(☎489-0220; Martínez de Hoz 257; mains AR\$35-80; ☎lunch & dinner) A very popular restaurant, Viento en Popa cooks up beef, chicken and pasta dishes – but seafood is its specialty. Only the freshest ingredients are used for the fried calamari, seafood stew and various sautéed fish plates. Look for it a couple blocks short of port's restaurants, just north of the YPF gas station.

Montecatini

ARGENTINE \$\$

(☎492-4299; cnr La Rioja & 25 de Mayo; mains AR\$40-70; ☎lunch & dinner, ♻) For solid, good-value dishes, make like the locals and head to this large, modern and popular restaurant. There's something for everyone on the menu – meat, fish, pasta, *milanesas*, stirfrys, sandwiches – and portions are generous. Good for families and large groups; several branches around town.

Pescadores

SEAFOOD \$\$\$

(☎493-1713; Blvd Marítimo & Av Luro; AR\$40-70; ☎lunch & dinner) Located out on the fishing pier, this seafood restaurant offers great water views – especially from its 2nd floor (open in summer only). The menu runs through typical Mardel offerings of meat, pasta and seafood, but you're here for the views.

El Jamón

INTERNATIONAL \$

(☎493-7447; Bolívar 2801; mains AR\$30-45; ☎lunch Mon-Sat, dinner Wed-Sat) There's little atmosphere at this neighborhood favorite, with plastic plants swinging from the beams. It's still full of locals, however, all enjoying the roasted *vacío* (flank steak), shrimp kebab or mussels provençal (menu choices change daily).

**Drinking**

At the Playa Grande end of town, the areas along Irigoyen and LN Alem, between Almafuerite and Rodríguez Peña, are popular nightlife magnets.

Antares

BAR

(Córdoba 3025; ☎8pm-late) The eight homebrews on tap at Mar del Plata's only microbrewery include imperial stout, pale ale and barley wine – excellent cures for the Quilmes blues. Food is available and there is live music most weekends.

Almacén Condal

BAR

(cnr Alsina & Garay; ☎9am-late) For traditional old atmosphere (the building is over 100 years old), you can't beat this funky corner bar. Talk to the locals at the long bar while munching the pub grub – it's sure to take you back in time.

La Bodeguita del Medio

CUBAN BAR

(Castelli 1252; ☎7pm-late) Named after one of Hemingway's favorite haunts, the mojitos at this atmospheric joint do him proud and are two-for-one between 7pm and 9pm. The Cuban dishes and bar snacks go down well, and there's occasional live music.

 **Shopping**

Calle Güemes is lined with upscale stores.

Diagonal de los Artesanos

CRAFTS FAIR

(Plaza San Martín; 6pm-late) Vendors set up their stalls every summer evening on Plaza San Martín to sell everything from *mate* gourds and knives to sweaters and silverwork. Open Friday and Saturday afternoons outside summer.

Mercado de Pulgas

FLEA MARKET

(Plaza Rocha; ☎10am-8pm Fri-Sun) This relaxed flea market, selling everything including the kitchen sink, is at 20 de Septiembre between San Martín and Av Luro, seven blocks northwest of Plaza San Martín.

 **Information****Money**

There are several money exchanges along San Martín and Rivadavia.

Jonestur (San Martín 2574)

La Moneta (Rivadavia 2623)

Post

Post office (Av Luro 2460 & Santiago del Estero)

Tourist Information

Municipal tourist office (☎495-1777; www.turismomardelplata.gov.ar; Blvd Marítimo 2270, in edificio casino; ☎8am-10pm) Exceptionally helpful. A smaller office is at Belgrano 2740.

 **Getting There & Away****Air**

Aerolíneas Argentinas (☎496-0101; Moreno 2442) has several daily flights to Buenos Aires.

LADE (☎491-1484; Corrientes 1537) is cheaper but flies much less frequently.

Bus

Mar del Plata's sparkling bus terminal is next to its train station, about 2km northwest of the beach. To get to the center, take local bus Nos 511, 512 or 513; taxis cost AR\$25.

At the corner of San Martín and Corrientes, in the city center, are a couple of travel offices that sell long-distance bus tickets – saving you a possible trip to the bus terminal.

Train

The **train station** (☎475-6076; Av Luro 4500) is 2km from the beach. There are regular overnight trains from Buenos Aires' Constitución train station (AR\$60-80, six hours), along with the fancier *Marplatense* and *Talgo* trains (AR\$100-200, six hours, day and evening departures). Reserve tickets well ahead in summer.

 **Getting Around**

The **airport** (☎478-0744) is 10km north of the city. To get there by bus, take bus No 542 (marked 'aeropuerto') from the corner of Blvd Marítimo and Belgrano.

Despite Mar del Plata's sprawl, frequent buses reach just about every place in town. However, most buses take magnetic cards ('tarjetas de aproximación') that must be bought ahead of time at *kioskos* and charged up. Popular bus 221 is an exception: it takes coins. The tourist office is a great resource for more transport details.

Car rentals are available at **Budget** (☎495-2935; Córdoba 2270).

BUSES FROM MAR DEL PLATA

DESTINATION	COST (ARS)	DURATION (HR)
Bahía Blanca	145	7
Bariolchoe	525	18-20
Buenos Aires	145-165	5½
Córdoba	415	16-18
Mendoza	470	18-20
Necochea	45	2¼
Pinamar	45	2½
Puerto Madryn	365	17
Tandil	55	3
Villa Gesell	32	2

Necochea

☎02262 / POP 92,000

Totally pumping in summer and near dead in winter, Necochea's beach-town feel is undisturbed by the highrises that keep springing up. With nearly 70km of beachfront, it's fairly certain that you'll be able to find a spot to lay your towel. Windy Necochea also has the best waves on the coast, attracting surfers throughout the year. The foresty Parque Municipal Miguel Lillo is a great bonus here, as are the walking and horseback riding opportunities out to the west of town. Another plus is that Necochea offers some of the best-value lodging on the coast.

Most of Necochea's services, such as the post office, banks and bus terminal, are inland about 3km from the beach.

🗨️ Sights & Activities

The dense pine woods of **Parque Provincial Miguel Lillo**, a large greenbelt along the beach, are widely used for cycling, horseback riding, walking and picnicking. Horses and bikes can both be rented inside the park.

The Río Quequén Grande, rich in rainbow trout and mackerel, also allows for easy rafting, particularly around the falls at **Salto del Quequén**. At the village of **Quequén** at the river's mouth, several stranded shipwrecks offer good opportunities for exploration and photography below sculpted cliffs. The **faro** (lighthouse) is another local attraction.

With some of the best waves along the Atlantic coast, Necochea is a hit with surfers. One surf school is **Monte Pasubio Surf Camp** (☎451482; www.montepasubio.com.ar; Av 502, No 1160), across the river in Quequén, where you can arrange classes and rent boards in summer.

🛏️ Sleeping

Note that some accommodations are only open December to March.

The following are all within four blocks of the beach.

Hostería del Bosque HOTEL \$\$
(☎420002; www.hosteria-delbosque.com.ar; Calle 89, No 350; r AR\$390-460; 🍷🍷🍷) This *hostería* is by far the most atmospheric place to stay in town. Rooms are large and comfortable, and some have views of Parque Lillo across the street. Nice grassy garden in back.

Belle Maison B&B \$\$
(☎462335; www.bellemaison.com.ar; Calle 4, btwn Paseos 106 & 107; r from AR\$330; 🍷🍷) Just five lovely rooms are available at this boutique hotel, actually a large house in a residential neighborhood near the center. Common spaces include a small garden, and there's even a bar counter inside.

Tres Reyes HOTEL \$\$
(☎522011; www.hotel-tresreyes.com.ar; Calle 4, No 4123; r from AR\$360; 🍷🍷) With an excellent location right on the square, this hotel has comfortable rooms and suites, some with park view. Next door is the budget **Hotel Mirasol** (www.mirasolhotel.com.ar).

Jamming Hostel HOSTEL \$
(☎02262-15-407508; www.jamminghostel.com.ar; Calle 502, No 1685; dm AR\$80) This mediterranean-style hostel is near the beach in nearby Quequén, 6km from Necochea's bus terminal (a taxi costs AR\$25). It's big on skateboarding and surfing culture. A restaurant and one private room available (AR\$180).

Hospedaje La Casona HOSPEDAJE \$
(☎423345; Calle 6, No 4356; d AR\$200, apt AR\$250) This rustic, family-run place offers guests basic rooms along with a spacious garden with a *parilla*. There are also apartments with kitchenettes.

🍴 Eating & Drinking

There are several dining options around Plaza San Martín. Many of the *balnearios* have eateries where you can grab a bite beachside. In low season many restaurants are only open on weekends.

Taberna Española SPANISH \$\$\$
(☎520539; cnr Calle 83 & 80; mains AR\$60-90; 🍷lunch & dinner) If you're looking for fine seafood, Spanish-style, head to this well-regarded restaurant. The 'special' menu includes a starter, main dish and dessert (AR\$70). There's another location next to Hostería del Bosque, Calle 89 No 360. Reserve in summer.

Chimichurri Asador PARRILLA \$\$
(Calle 83, No 345; mains AR\$50-70; 🍷lunch & dinner) Only carnivores are welcome at this *parilla*, favored by locals for its delicious meats.

Antares ARGENTINE \$\$\$
(Calle 4, No 4266; AR\$40-70; 🍷dinner Tue-Sun) This is yet another branch of the beautiful bar-restaurant chain. There's a decent selection of pub-style food, along with several

WORTH A TRIP

MIRAMAR

If you've got kids consider a side trip to Miramar, a family-friendly destination with long, wide beach and gentle waves (surfable in spots). Compared to Mar del Plata, 45km to the north, Miramar fairly low-key – but like any other Argentine resort it does get crowded in summer.

Get information at the **tourist office** (☎02291-420190; cnr Calle 21 & Costanera; ☎8am-10pm), located at the beach. Ask about the various activities possible in town, such as horseback riding, golfing or fishing. Miramar is known for its surf, more easily accessible at the north end of town where there are a few surf schools.

For accommodations, consider **Aventureiro Hostel** (☎02291-430981; Calle 16 No 1067; www.aventureiro.com.ar; dm AR\$125, r AR\$250; 🍷🍷), an average hostel but just a couple blocks from the beach; or the pleasant-enough **Hotel Danieli** (☎02291-432366; Calle 24 No 1114; www.hoteldanielimiramar.com.ar; s/d from AR\$400/530; 🍷). The bus terminal is at Av 40 and Calle 15, within six blocks of the center.

Those looking for downright isolation can head to **Mar de Sud**, a small town 16km south of Miramar. It's known for its rustic atmosphere, black-rock beach and fishing waters – and claims some hotel ruins as a main tourist attraction. There are no tall buildings here and much fewer services than its neighbor, so if you're looking to get away from the crowds this should be your stop.

craft-style beers (actually brewed in Mar del Plata).

If you need a drink, check out the bars on Calle 87 between Calles 4 and 6.

📍 Information

Municipal hospital (☎422405; Av 59, btwn Calles 100 & 104)

Municipal tourist office (☎438333; cnr Avs 2 & 79; ☎8am-10pm) On the beach; also at the bus terminal from mid-December to March.

Post office (Calle 6, No 4065)

🚗 Getting There & Away

The **bus terminal** (Av 58, btw Calle 47 & Av 45) is 3.5km from the beach (taxi cost AR\$15, or take local bus 513, marked 'playa'). Destinations include Buenos Aires (AR\$176, seven hours), Mar del Plata (AR\$45, 2½ hours), Tandil (AR\$45, three hours) and Bahía Blanca (AR\$105, five hours).

Bahía Blanca

☎0291 / POP 302,000

Grandiose buildings, an attractive plaza and boulevards lined with shade trees and palms lend oft-overlooked Bahía Blanca the feel of a cosmopolitan city in miniature. Its chief advantage is as a resting point during overland trips from Buenos Aires to Patagonia, but it's not entirely without interest.

The hordes of sailors who dock here, at what is now South America's largest naval base, attest to Bahía Blanca's militaristic

beginnings. In an early effort to establish military control on the periphery of the pampas, Colonel Ramón Estomba situated the pompously named Fortaleza Protectora Argentina at the natural harbor of Bahía Blanca in 1828.

🗨️ Sights & Activities

On the outskirts of town – in a former customs building that's hardly noticeable among the massive grain elevators and fortress-like power plant of Puerto Ingeniero White – the **Museo del Puerto** (☎457-3006; cnr Guillermo Torres & Cárrega; admission by donation; ☎8am-noon Mon-Fri, 4-8pm Sat & Sun) is a tribute to the region's immigrants, and includes an archive with documents, photographs and recorded oral histories. The best time to visit is for a weekend afternoon tea, when local groups prepare regional delicacies, each week representing a different immigrant group. Take bus 500 from the plaza.

The neoclassical **Teatro Municipal** (Alsina 425) is the performing-arts center. In the same building is **Museo Histórico** (☎456-3117; admission free; ☎9am-12:30pm Tue-Fri, 4-8pm Wed-Sun). Displays include indigenous artifacts and collections that represent episodes in the life of the region, such as its founding as a military base and the arrival of the railways. Worth checking is **Museo de Arte Contemporáneo** (☎459-4006; Sarmiento 450; admission free; ☎2-8pm Tue-Fri, 5-8pm Sat & Sun), showcasing local and national artists.

On weekends an afternoon **artisans market** takes over Plaza Rivadavia, opposite the Municipalidad.

Sleeping

Catering mainly to the business set, accommodations in Bahía Blanca are generally more expensive than in other Argentine towns its size; however, good deals can be found.

Rio Oja Apart Hotel

HOTEL \$\$
(☎481-9922; www.aparhotelrio-oja.com.ar; Estados Unidos 65; s/d AR\$240/300; 🏠🚿) If you're just passing through, this modern hotel is a good choice – it's near the bus terminal. The eight rooms are different sizes but efficient and stocked with a tiny closet kitchenette.

Hotel Muñiz

HOTEL \$\$
(☎456-0060; www.hotelmuniz.com.ar; O'Higgins 23; s AR\$195-315, d AR\$290-420; 🏠🚿) Centrally located and in a beautiful old building, the Muñiz offers four levels of decent but unmemorable rooms, and hallways that are cold and tiled. The lobby, however, has great old atmosphere.

Firenze Hotel

HOTEL \$
(☎455-7746; Rondeau 39; s/d AR\$130-180; 🏠🚿) A good deal for what you get, this small hotel has 17 simple rooms – most with wood floors – in a remodeled old building. Bathrooms have open showers.

Hotel Victoria

HOTEL \$
(☎452-0522; www.hotelvictoriabb.com.ar; General Paz 84; s/d AR\$180/290; 🏠🚿) This well-kept old building has good, comfortable rooms with cable TV, set around a central courtyard.

Bahía Blanca Hostel

HOSTEL \$
(☎452-6802; www.hostelbahia blanca.com; Soler 701; dm AR\$42, s AR\$50-70, d AR\$100; 🏠🚿) Lo-

cated in an ancient hotel, this hostel isn't exactly cozy – but staff are friendly. Basic private rooms are set around an old patio; the cheapest share bathrooms. Many transient male workers stay here, so it doesn't have that usual 'international' flavor. Pickup from bus terminal if car is available.

Eating

Piazza

ARGENTINE \$\$
(cnr O'Higgins & Chiclana; mains AR\$40-55; ☺breakfast, lunch & dinner) A popular cafe on the plaza, with an extensive menu that includes pizza, pasta, meats and gourmet salads and sandwiches. Also 'lite' choices such as soy milanesas. Popular sidewalk tables and a fully stocked bar too.

Bambú

BUFFET \$\$
(Chiclana 298; buffet AR\$47-56; ☺lunch & dinner) The best deal in town for the hungry is this *tenedor libre* (all-you-can-eat restaurant) efficiently run by a Chinese family. Choose from heaps of cooked dishes (many with Asian flavor), along with Argentine *asado* (barbecue grill); drinks are extra. Very popular, and there's takeout too.

El Mundo de la Parrilla

PARRILLA \$\$
(Av Colón 379; mains AR\$40-75; ☺lunch Tue-Sun, dinner nightly) It can get busy at this buzzing *parrilla*, which locals agree is the best in town. The *tenedor libre* (AR\$75) sees an endless procession of succulent grilled meats brought to your table. Salad bar and drinks are extra.

Gambrinus

ARGENTINE \$\$
(Arribeños 174; mains AR\$35-80; ☺lunch & dinner) Located behind the Hotel Italia is this traditional, old-time restaurant that dates from the 19th century. The menu is typically Argentine but there's lots of choice, and it's popular with the locals.

Information

Post office (Moreno 34)

Tourist kiosk (cnr Drago & Av Colón; ☺9am-1pm, 3-7pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun) The bus terminal also has a tourist office.

Getting There & Away

Air

Bahía Blanca's airport is 15km east of town; taxis there cost AR\$70 (there are no buses). Airlines include **Aerolíneas Argentinas** (☎456-0561; San Martín 298), **LAN** (☎0810-999-9526; Chiclana 370) and **LADE** (☎452-1063; Darragueira 21).

Bus

Bahía Blanca's **bus terminal** (☎481-9615; Brown 1700) is about 2km southeast of Plaza Rivadavia. Taxis to the city enter cost AR\$20-25; there are local buses also, but you'll have to buy a magnetic card at a *kiosco* to use them (and there's no *kiosco* selling them at the terminal).

There are several businesses – including *locutorios* (private telephone offices) and the travel agent **Dakar** (☎456-2030; Chiclana 102) – right at the south end of Plaza Rivadavia that sell bus tickets, saving you a trip to the bus terminal for information. These different businesses sell different bus company's tickets, so ask around if you want a particular schedule, company or price.

Condor Estrella and Expreso Cabildo (buy ticket at platform 1) each offer two or three daily services to Sierra de la Ventana.

Train

Trains leave from the **Estación Ferrocarril Roca** (☎452-9196; www.ferrobaires.gba.gov.ar; Av Cerri 750) for Buenos Aires every day except Monday and Saturday, at around 7pm (AR\$44 to \$AR73, 12 to 15 hours). There's also a service to Sierra de la Ventana on Wednesday and Friday (AR\$11, three hours), and once a week a very slow service heads south to Carmen de Patagones (though it tends to get cancelled from time to time).

BUSES FROM BAHÍA BLANCA

DESTINATION	COST (AR\$)	DURATION (HR)
Bariloche	310	12-14
Buenos Aires	245	9
Córdoba	285	13-15
Mar del Plata	145	7
Mendoza	370	16
Neuquén	170	7½
Sierra de la Ventana	32	2
Trelew	255	10-12

Iguazú Falls & the Northeast

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Best Places to Eat

- » Enófilos (p161)
- » Bocamora (p192)
- » La Cosquilla del Ángel (p171)
- » Lo Mejor del Centro (p148)

Best Places to Stay

- » Los Silos (p152)
- » La Alondra (p159)
- » Posada de la Laguna (p167)
- » La Cantera Iguazú (p191)
- » Atrium Gualok (p202)
- » Esplendor Savoy Rosario (p146)

Why Go?

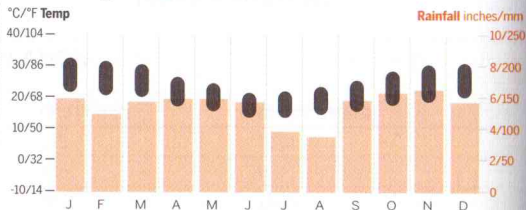
Northeast Argentina is defined by water. Muscular rivers roll through flat pastureland that they flood at will, while fragile wetlands support myriad birdlife, snapping caimans and cuddly capybaras. The peaceful Río Iguazú, meandering through the tropical forest between Brazil and Argentina, dissolves in fury and power in the planet's most awe-inspiring waterfalls.

The river then flows into the Paraná, one of the world's mightiest watercourses, which surges southward, eventually forming the Río de la Plata near Buenos Aires. Along it are some of the country's most interesting cities: elegant Corrientes, colonial Santa Fe and booming Rosario, as well as Posadas, gateway to the ruined splendor of the Jesuit missions.

Dotted throughout the region are excellent reserves and national parks, representative of the biological diversity of this region. The shallow freshwater lakes of the Esteros del Iberá harbor an astonishing richness of wildlife that's easily seen among the aquatic plants.

When to Go

Puerto Iguazú



Feb Hot weather and flashy Carnival celebrations in Gualeguaychú, Corrientes and Posadas.

Aug Cool and dry; spot animals in the Esteros del Iberá gathered around scarce water sources.

Sep-Oct Not too cold, hot or crowded. Iguazú flowing well but flooding and rain less likely.

National Parks & Reserves

There are some excellent national parks within the region, varying from the dry savannas of the Chaco to the rainforests of Misiones.

In the far northeast, Parque Nacional do Iguacu (p188) and Parque Nacional Iguazú (p186) are the access points for viewing the incredible Iguazú Falls, and also provide a habitat for orchids, big cats, birdlife and other flora and fauna.

Nowhere will you see quite as much wildlife as in the wetlands of Reserva Provincial Esteros del Iberá (p163), while it's the haunting elegance of yatay palm trees that makes Parque Nacional El Palmar (p171) so very special.

Deforestation has denuded much of the Chaco area, so the scrub forests and marshes of Parque Nacional Chaco (p201) and Parque Nacional Río Pilcomayo (p202) are especially valuable, as are the natural reserves that are located further west in the region (see the boxed text, p203).

ALONG THE RÍO PARANÁ

The mighty Río Paraná, the continent's second-longest river at 4000km (after the Amazon at 6405km), dominates the geography of Northeast Argentina. Several of the nation's more interesting cities lie along it; all have their town centers a sensible distance above the shorelines of this flood-prone monster, but have a *costanera* (riverbank) that's the focus of much social life. The river is still important for trade, and large oceangoing vessels ply it to and beyond Rosario, a city whose friendly inhabitants and optimistic outlook make it a great destination.

Santa Fe and Paraná have a relaxing sleepy feel – who can blame them, with the humidity the Paraná generates? – and attractive traditional architecture, while beautiful Corrientes is the home of *chamamé* music (a local musical style derived from polka) and launch pad for the wonderful Esteros del Iberá wetlands.

The Paraná is the demesne of enormous river fish – surubí, dorado and pacú among others – that attract sports fishers from around the world. Their distinctive flavors enliven the menus of the region's restaurants; make sure you try them.

Rosario

0341 / POP 1.19 MILLION

The boom times are back for Rosario, birthplace of both the Argentine flag and 'Che' Guevara, and an important river port. The derelict buildings of the long *costanera* have been converted into galleries, restaurants and skate parks, and the river beaches and islands buzz with life in summer. The center – a curious mishmash of stunning early-20th-century buildings overshadowed by ugly apartments – has a comfortable, lived-in feel, and the down-to-earth *rosarinos* (people from Rosario) are a delight. All are very proud of the city's current claim to fame: Lionel Messi, a golden boy of world soccer (football), is Rosario born and bred.

Though it's a private home and you can't enter, you may want to check out the apartment building at Entre Ríos 480, where the newborn Ernesto 'Che' Guevara had his first home.

History

Rosario's first European inhabitants settled here informally around 1720 without sanction from the Spanish crown. After independence Rosario quickly superseded Santa Fe as the province's economic powerhouse, though, to the irritation of *rosarinos*, the provincial capital retained political primacy.

The Central Argentine Land Company, an adjunct of the railroad, was responsible for bringing in agricultural colonists from Europe, for whom Rosario was a port of entry. From 1869 to 1914 Rosario's population grew nearly tenfold.

Though the decline of economic and shipping activity during the 1960s led to a drop in Rosario's population and power, its importance as a port was rivaled only by Buenos Aires. Its title as Argentina's second city, however, was later usurped by Córdoba – a status still hotly contested by *rosarinos*.

Nationalistic Argentines cherish Rosario, which is home to a monument to the nation's flag, as Cuna de la Bandera (Cradle of the Flag).

Sights & Activities

La Costanera

NEIGHBORHOOD, BEACH

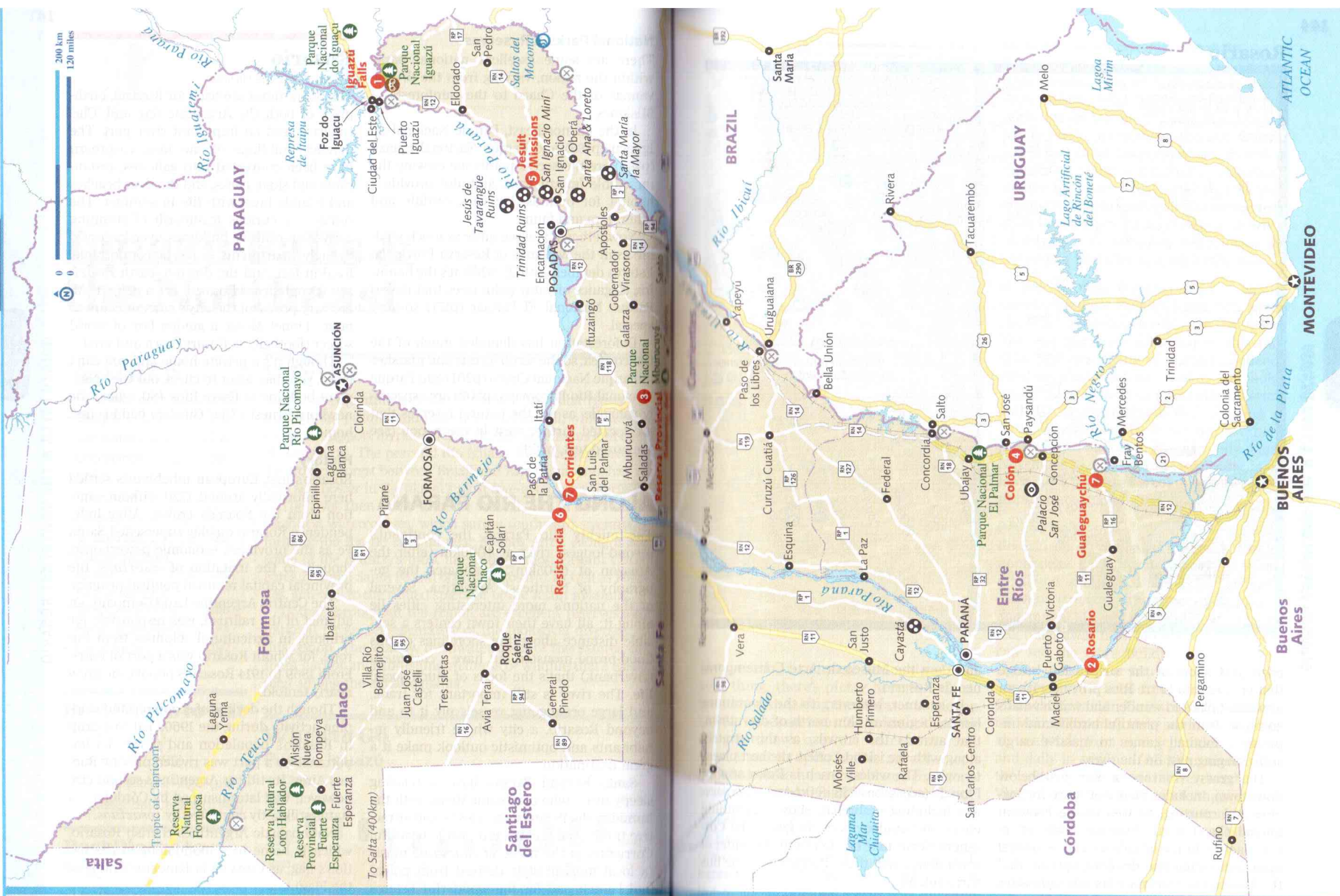
Rosario's most attractive feature is its waterfront, where what was once home to derelict warehouses and train tracks has largely been reclaimed for the fun of the people. It stretches some 15km from its southern end at Parque Urquiza to the city's northern

Iguazú Falls & the Northeast Highlights

- Drop your jaw in stunned amazement at the beauty and power of the **Iguazú Falls** (p185)
- Get personal with the mighty Paraná in livable, lovable **Rosario** (p141)
- Ooo at the cute capybaras of the **Reserva Provincial Esteros del Iberá** (p163)
- Munch delicious freshwater fish by the Rio Uruguay in pretty **Colón** (p170)
- Ponder a unique experiment in humanity at the ruined **Jesuit missions** (p174)

Admire the sculptures in

- Resistencia** (p197) and plotting a trip to the 'impenetrable' Chaco, a bastion of traditional indigenous culture
- Live it up at one of the region's classic **Carnaval** celebrations in Gualaguaychú (p170) or Corrientes (p159)



Rosario



edge, just short of the suspension bridge that crosses into Entre Ríos province. It's an appealing place to wander and watch what's going on, from the plentiful birdlife and impromptu football games to massive cargo ships surging past on the river.

The grassy **Costanera Sur**, just below downtown, includes plenty of space for jogging and courting, as well as the Estación Fluvial (La Fluvial) building. This offers boats across to the islands as well as several upmarket eating and drinking options, and the **Museo Del Paraná y las Islas** (donation; ☉4-8pm Sat & Sun). This is a labor of love by local painter Raúl Domínguez, documenting life on the river islands with photos, murals and artifacts.

Heading further north, you pass various cultural venues before reaching the **Parque de España** and its mausoleumlike edifice. Beyond here is a zone of bars and restaurants that gets lively at weekends,

and then the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Rosario.

In summer, however, it's the **Costanera Norte**, beginning 5km north of downtown, that attracts the crowds, as this stretch, along with the islands, offers the best places to swim. The widest beach is **Balneario La Florida** (admission AR\$8; ☉Oct-Apr), with services including umbrellas, showers, clothing check and outdoor bars. To get to the Costanera Norte, take bus 153 from the center of town 6km north to Av Puccio (here the bus turns inland).

FREE Monumento Nacional a La Bandera

MONUMENT
(www.monumentoaalabandera.gov.ar; Santa Fe 581; ☉9am-6pm Tue-Sun, 2-6pm Mon Apr-Sep, to 7pm daily Oct-Mar) Manuel Belgrano, who designed the Argentine flag, rests in a crypt beneath this colossal stone obelisk built where the blue-and-white stripes were



first raised. If rampant nationalism isn't your thing, there's plenty here to look at, but it's worth taking the elevator to the top (AR\$3, closes an hour for lunch at 1pm) for the great views over the waterfront, river Paraná and its islands. The attractive colonnade houses an eternal flame commemorating those who died for the fatherland.

Museo Municipal de Bellas Artes

GALLERY
(www.museocastagnino.org.ar; cnr Av Carlos Pellegrini & Blvd Oroño; admission AR\$4; ☉2-8pm Mon & Wed-Fri, 1-7pm Sat & Sun) This museum is worth a visit for its brilliantly inventive juxtapositions of fine art – and there are a couple of exceptional European paintings here – with contemporary artworks from the MACRO (Museo De Arte Contemporáneo De Rosario) collection. A *St Andrew* by Ribera, for example, is beautifully matched with a haunting photo portrait by Pierre Gonnord.

Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Rosario (MACRO)

GALLERY
(www.macromuseo.org.ar; Av de la Costa at Blvd Oroño; donation AR\$3; ☉2-8pm Thu-Tue Mar-Aug, 3-9pm Thu-Tue Sep-Feb) Housed in a brightly painted grain silo on the waterfront, this gallery is part of Rosario's impressive riverbank renewal. It features temporary exhibitions, mostly by young local artists, of varying quality, housed in small galleries spread over eight floors. There's a good view of the river islands from the *mirador* (viewpoint) at the top and an attractive cafe-bar by the river.

Museo Histórico Provincial

MUSEUM
(www.santafe.gov.ar; Parque Independencia; admission AR\$2; ☉9am-5pm Tue-Fri, 2-6pm Sat & Sun) The well-presented collection of this museum features plenty of postindependence exhibits plus excellent displays on indigenous cultures from all over Latin America. Particularly interesting is the collection of baroque religious art from the southern Andes. Information in Spanish only. From November to April weekend opening is an hour later. It's closed when football is on in the adjacent stadium.

Paraná Delta

ISLANDS
Rosario sits on the banks of the Río Paraná upper delta, a 60km-wide area of mostly uninhabited, subtropical islands and winding *riachos* (streams). It's an area rich in bird and animal life, and even the closest islands feel miles away from anywhere, though you can see the city's buildings looming less than a kilometer or two away. Various boat services can be used to reach the islands. From the **Estación Fluvial** (☎447-3838; www.lafluvialrosario.com.ar) there are hourly boats at weekends from mid-September to May, and daily in summer (AR\$30 roundtrip) to the southern *balnearios* (river beaches) of Vladimir and Deja Vu. Boats to the northern *balnearios* leave regularly in summer from Embarcadero Costa Alta on the Costanera Norte.

The best way to get a feel for the delta ecosystem is to take a tour in a boat.

Courses

Spanish in Rosario

LANGUAGE
(☎437-2860; www.spanishinrosario.com; Catamarca 3095) Rosario's a great place to hang out for a while, and this set-up offers enjoyable language programs to help you put that time to good use. They can arrange family stays and volunteer work placements.

Rosario

Top Sights

Monumento Nacional a la Bandera.....	F2
Museo Municipal de Bellas Artes.....	A3

Sights

1 'Che' Guevara's First Home.....	D1
2 Estación Fluvial.....	F2
3 Museo del Paraná y las Islas.....	F3
4 Museo Histórico Provincial.....	A4
5 Parque de España.....	E1

Activities, Courses & Tours

6 Ciudad de Rosario.....	F2
7 Rosario Bike, Kayak & Motor Boat Tours.....	F4

Sleeping

8 Anamundana.....	D4
9 Barisit House Hotel.....	E3
10 Che Pampa's.....	E2
11 Esplendor Savoy Rosario.....	E2
12 Hostel La Comunidad.....	D1
13 Hotel La Paz.....	D3
14 Hotel Plaza del Sol.....	D3
15 Hotel Plaza Real.....	C1
16 Hotel Romijor.....	E3
17 La Casona de Don Jaime II.....	D1

Tours

TOP CHOICE Rosario Bike, Kayak & Motor Boat Tours

BOAT, CYCLING TOURS
(2)0341-15-571-3812; www.bikerosario.com.ar, www.kayaktoursrosario.com.ar; Zeballos 327) A professional set-up with boat trips around the Paraná delta (AR\$100, 2½ hours) with bird watching and city views. You can also explore the islands by kayak (AR\$140, 3½ hours) or combine the two. Good bike tours of the city (AR\$100, 3½ hours) are available.

Ciudad de Rosario BOAT TOUR
(2)449-8688; www.barcocr1.com) Near the Estación Fluvial, this converted barge offers two-hour cruises on the Paraná for AR\$31; it leaves on weekends and holidays at 2:30pm and 5pm, or 5pm and 7:30pm in summer.

Island Explorer BOAT TOUR
(2)0341-15-628-9287; rosariosail@hotmail.com) Offers trips around the Paraná islands in a speedy inflatable. Trips run on Saturdays and Sundays, last 90 minutes and cost AR\$80. Can also arrange trips in a yacht.

18 Roberta Rosa de Fontana Suites.....	D2
19 Ros Tower.....	D1
20 Rosario Inn.....	E1

Eating

21 Amarra.....	E2
22 De Buen Humor.....	C2
23 La Chernia, El Chucho y La Cholga.....	E3
24 Lo Mejor del Centro.....	D2
25 Rincón Vegetariano.....	D2

Drinking

26 El Cairo.....	D2
27 La Sede.....	D1
28 Pasaporte.....	E2

Entertainment

29 Estadio Parque Independencia.....	A4
30 Gotika.....	D4
Moore.....	(see 2)
31 Peña la Amistad.....	E3
32 Rosario Central.....	D2

Shopping

33 Mercado de Pulgas del Bajo.....	F2
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Festivals & Events

TOP CHOICE Encuentro de Colectividades

MULTICULTURAL

(www.encuentrodecolectividades.com) In November on the riverbank at the intersection with Dorrego, this 10-day party is divided into dozens of areas representing the countries of origin that make up the nation. National food, dress, music and dance performances make for a family-friendly atmosphere.

Semana de la Bandera FIESTA

Climaxing in ceremonies on June 20, the anniversary of the death of Manuel Belgrano, Flag Week is Rosario's major fiesta.

Sleeping

Booming Rosario has a huge number of places to stay. There are over 40 hostels (ask the tourist office for a list) and an ever-increasing herd of midrange hotels.

TOP CHOICE Esplendor Savoy Rosario HOTEL \$\$\$
(2)429-6000; www.esplendorsavoyrosario.com; San Lorenzo 1022; r/superior/steAR\$446/532/666;

(2)424-5202; www.chepampas.com; Rioja 812; dm AR\$45-60, tw/d AR\$136/180; (2)424-5202) Designed with verve and panache, this is one of the best-looking hostels we've ever seen. Plush colors and stylish touches characterize the comfortable dorms, which have a bit of road noise. There are also private rooms available, as well as almost any facility (DVDs, excellent kitchen, barbecue area, patio) you care to mention. The enthusiastic staff caps off an excellent place to stay.

Barisit House Hotel HOTEL \$\$
(2)447-6464; www.barisit.com.ar; Laprida 1311; s/d AR\$280/320; (2)447-6464) Go for one of the upstairs front rooms in this converted historic house if you'll enjoy the romance of original floorboards, high ceilings, windows and balconies. The modern rooms are similarly attractively decorated, and quieter. The personal small-hotel atmosphere is a real drawcard.

Hotel Plaza del Sol HOTEL \$\$\$
(2)421-9899; www.hotelesplaza.com; San Juan 1055; w/d AR\$340/370; (2)421-9899) Recent renovation has left the rooms here feeling new and looking good; most are very spacious indeed, and the beds are comfortable. It's the best of the clutch of hotels on Plaza Montenegro; there's a gym, sundeck and heated indoor pool on the 11th floor, as well as helpful service. It's pretty decent value, especially if you grab a discount by shopping around online.

La Casona de Don Jaime II HOTEL \$
(2)530-2020; www.youthhostelrosario.com.ar; San Lorenzo 1530; dm/d AR\$60/210; (2)530-2020) There's plenty of punch for your peso at this friendly hostel. It's quiet and clean, with a climbing wall in the patio. Dorm beds have plenty of headroom and air-con is available for a little extra. Upstairs are rather smart themed private rooms. Discounts midweek and for HI (Hostelling International) members.

Hostel La Comunidad HOTEL \$
(2)424-5302; www.lacomunidadhostel.com; Roca 453; dm/d AR\$50/140; (2)424-5302) Occupying a gorgeous old Rosario building, this spot has

lofty ceilings and a light, airy feel. The dorms have handsome wooden bunks and floorboards; a cute private room is also available. There's a bar, lounge area and peaceful vibe.

Hotel La Paz HOTEL \$
(2)421-0905; www.hotellapazrosario.com.ar; Barón de Maua 36; s/d AR\$180/220; (2)421-0905) Well positioned on Plaza Montenegro, and still looking good after 60 years in operation, this welcoming hotel offers value for money. Family rooms at the front have balconies overlooking Plaza Montenegro. If it's a little faded for your tastes, the same folks run a more modern place, the **Baron del Mil**, next door.

Roberta Rosa de Fontana Suites APARTMENT HOTEL \$\$
(2)449-6767; www.rrodsuites.com.ar; Entre Ríos 914; r AR\$350; (2)449-6767) Situated very centrally above a colorful cafe, these rooms are modern and commodious, with brushed concrete ceiling, black floors and a small kitchenette. They come in various sizes, making it a good family option.

Rosario Inn HOSTEL \$
(2)421-0358; www.rosarioinnhostel.com.ar; Sargento Cabral 54; dm/d AR\$50/140; (2)421-0358) Right opposite the massive customs building near the river, this colorful hostel makes up in location and laid-back atmosphere what it lacks in facilities. Set around patios, it offers a helpful welcome, good social scene and activities. The six-bed dorms are comfortable enough; bathrooms are just adequate.

Anamundana HOSTEL \$
(2)424-3077; www.anamundanahostel.com; Montevideo 1248; dm/d AR\$70/250; (2)424-3077) A block from the Pellegrini eat-street strip, this wins points for comfortable mattresses, warm personal service and an appealing private double. Breakfast is above average, and it's cheaper midweek.

Hotel Romijor HOTEL \$
(2)421-7276; Laprida 1050; (2)421-7276) Spacious rooms and warm personal service are the features of this old-fashioned and handily central budget hotel. It was closed for renovations at last visit but should be open again by the time you read this.

Ros Tower HOTEL \$\$\$
(2)529-9000; www.rostower.com.ar; Mitre 295; r from AR\$620; (2)529-9000) Great service and facilities in this sleek business-spa hotel with top river views from many rooms.

Hotel Plaza Real HOTEL \$\$
(☎440-8800; www.plazarealhotel.com; Santa Fe 1632; r standard/superior/luxury AR\$451/532/949; 🍷🍷🍷) Luxurious rooms, apartments and suites in business hotel with rooftop pool. Fine facilities, a cracking breakfast and polite friendly service.

Eating

Central Rosario seems empty come supper-time. That's because half the city is out on Av Carlos Pellegrini. Between Buenos Aires and Moreno there's a vast number of family-friendly eateries, including several barnlike *parrillas* (steak restaurants), dozens of pizza places, several all-you-can-eat buffet joints, bars and excellent ice-creameries. Just stroll along and take your pick. Most places have terraces on the street.

TOP CHOICE **Lo Mejor del Centro** PARRILLA \$
(Santa Fe 1171; mains AR\$28-55) When this *parrilla* went bust, the staff were left high and dry, but the local government let them reopen it as a cooperative, and what a great job they've done. The meat's as good as you'll taste in Rosario, but you can also enjoy homemade pasta, creative salads and a warm, convivial buzz at the tightly packed tables.

Amarra ARGENTINE \$\$
(☎447-7550; www.amarrarestaurante.com.ar; cnr Buenos Aires & Av Belgrano; mains AR\$35-70; ☺lunch daily, dinner Mon-Sat; 🍷) Smart but relaxed, this restaurant opposite the tourist office has a stylish split-level interior and serves up some very imaginative dishes, beautifully presented and prepared. Its specialty is fish, but the meat is also delicious.

El Viejo Balcón PARRILLA \$\$
(cnr Italia & Wheelwright; mains AR\$50-70) Be prepared to wait for a table at this long-time Rosario favorite in a *parrilla*-rich zone by the river. The meat is generously proportioned and of excellent quality: staff even listen to how you want it cooked. But there's enough on the menu here – crêpes, pastas – to cater for all tastes.

La Chernia, El Chucho y La Cholga SEAFOOD \$\$
(www.rubenmolinengo.com; cnr JM de Rosas & Mendoza; mains AR\$45-80) Step back a century in time as you walk into this beautifully-decorated romantic corner restaurant. The long menu is all fish, from local river varieties to

stews and soups bursting with tasty seafood. Shared platters for two are an enjoyable and good-value way to go here.

Los Jardines de Hildegarda CAFE \$
(www.losjardinesrestobar.com.ar; riverbank near España; dishes AR\$20-40; ☺noon-late Tue-Sun; 🍷) Right by the river, this offbeat spot serves a short menu of pasta, mussels, pizza and potato dishes, as well as tasty *licuados* (blended fruit drinks) and plenty of relaxation. The setting is delightful – some may say better than the food. Take the lift down from next to Don Ferro restaurant.

De Buen Humor ICE CREAM \$
(www.debuenhumorhelados.com.ar; Rioja 1560; cones AR\$10-15; 🍷🍷) Ice cream here comes from happy cows, they say. We can't vouch for that, but anyone with a sweet tooth will be mooing contentedly at the optimism-filled decor, patio seating and tasty cones, concoctions and fruit salads.

Don Ferro PARRILLA \$\$
(www.puertoespana.com.ar; mains AR\$30-85; 🍷) A very good-looking *parrilla* in what was once Rosario's train station, with a delightful terrace on the platform, excellent service and seriously delicious meat. It's on the riverbank near España.

Rincón Vegetariano VEGETARIAN \$
(turinonvegetariano.blogspot.com; Mitre 720; dishes AR\$15-22; ☺lunch & dinner Mon-Sat; 🍷) This mostly vegetarian place offers a huge range of meat-free hot and cold dishes to eat in or take out. There are always all sorts of deals going.

Drinking

Rosario has a great number of *restobares*, which function as hybrid cafes and bars and generally serve a fairly standard selection of snacks and plates. Many are good for either a morning coffee or an evening glass of wine – or anything in between.

Pasaporte CAFE, BAR
(cnr Maipú & Urquiza; ☺8am-late Mon-Sat; 🍷) A sublimely cozy spot with a pretty terrace and timeworn wooden furniture, including little window booths, the Pasaporte is a favorite for morning coffee with workers from the customs department opposite. But it also has a great evening atmosphere, particularly when the rain's pouring down outside.

El Cairo CAFE, BAR
(www.barelcairo.com; cnr Sarmiento & Santa Fe; ☺7am-1am Mon-Thu, 7am-3am Fri & Sat, 4pm-1am

Sun; 🍷) High ceilinged and elegant, with huge panes of glass for people-watching (and vice versa), this classic Rosario cafe is good at any time of day, but especially in the evening, when it mixes a decent cocktail and puts on good Argentine pub grub. If you've been hankering to try the national beverage, this is also one of the rare places that serve *mate*.

La Sede CAFE
(Entre Ríos 599; 🍷) In a striking modernist building, this is a very Argentine cafe with a literary feel. Come here to read a book, enjoy the cakes and quiches or, at weekends, catch an offbeat live performance of something or other.

Fenicia BREWPUB
(www.cerveceriafenicia.com; Francia 168) You can smell the malt at this brewpub, where the delicious ales are produced right beneath your feet. It's a fine place to start exploring this bar-rich nightlife zone, and it also does a handy line in quesadillas, burgers and salads. The roof terrace is good on a warm evening. It's northwest of the center, near the train station.

Entertainment

There are lots of tango places in Rosario; grab the monthly listings booklet *Rosario de Tango* from the tourist office.

La Casa del Tango TANGO
(www.lacasadelangorosario.com; riverbank at España) This tango center has info on performances around town, offers fun, very cheap evening lessons, and stages various events. There's also a good cafe and restaurant.

Peña la Amistad TRADITIONAL MUSIC
(www.folklorerosario.com; Maipú 1111; ☺10pm-late Fri & Sat) For a different night out, head down to this folksy spot, where a harp and guitar duo bang out traditional music accompanied by the smell of roasting meat, stamping feet and corks being popped.

Gotika GAY
(www.gotikacityclub.com.ar; Mitre 1539; ☺Fri-Sun) Ht behind the imposing facade of a former church, this mainly gay place kicks off at weekends with a variety of music from drum 'n' bass to house.

Moore CLUB
(Estación Fluvial; admission AR\$25; ☺Thu-Sat Mar-Nov) One of the few central nightclubs (admission AR\$25), this is atmospherically

located in the Estación Fluvial building with an outdoor deck and packed upstairs dance floor.

Madame CLUB
(www.mdmdisco.com; cnr Brown & Francia; ☺11pm-5:30am Fri-Sat) Claiming to be Latin America's biggest club, this massive, stylish former factory complex draws people from Buenos Aires at weekends.

Sports

Rosario has two rival soccer teams with several league titles between them. **Newell's Old Boys** (☎421-1180; www.nob.com.ar) plays in red and black at **Estadio Parque Independencia**, where the club is based, and has a long, proud history of producing great Argentine footballers. **Rosario Central** (☎421-0000; www.rosariocentral.com; Mitre 857) plays in blue and yellow stripes at **Estadio 'El Gigante de Arroyito'** (☎438-9595; cnr Blvd Avellaneda & Génova). Buy tickets from the stadiums or Rosario Central's club office.

Shopping

Mercado de Pulgas del Bajo MARKET
(Av Belgrano; ☺2-9pm Sat & Sun) A small hand-crafts market by the tourist office, where dealers sell everything from silverwork to leather goods. There are several other weekend markets around the city.

Information

There are numerous places to get online, and plenty of spots offer free wi-fi, including the plane-shaded Plaza 25 de Mayo (network: mr_gratuita).

Several 24-hour pharmacies are in the center of town, including one at the corner of San Lorenzo and Entre Ríos.

Banks and ATMs are all over, with a cluster along Santa Fe near Plaza 25 de Mayo. Exchanges along San Martín and Córdoba change traveler's checks (with commission) and cash.

There are many *locutorios* (private telephone offices) around the center.

Hospital Clemente Alvarez (☎480-8111; Rueda 1110) Southwest of the city center.

Post office (Córdoba 721)

Red Urbana (Av Corrientes 563; per hr AR\$3; ☺24hr) Internet access.

Tourist office (☎480-2230; www.rosario.turismo.com; Av del Huerto; ☺9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 9am-6pm Sun) Near the waterfront. There's another office at the long-distance bus terminal.

Getting There & Away

Air

Austral (☎0810-222-86527; www.austral.com.ar) Goes to Buenos Aires.

Gol (www.voegol.com) Serves Porto Alegre and Brasilia in Brazil.

Sol (☎0810-444-4765; www.sol.com.ar) Flies daily to Buenos Aires and also services Mendoza, Córdoba, Montevideo and Tucumán.

Bus

The **long-distance bus terminal** (☎437-3030; www.terminalrosario.com.ar, in Spanish; Caf-ferata & Santa Fe) is 25 blocks west of the city center. From downtown, any bus along Santa Fe will do the trick.

Rosario is a major transport hub and there are direct daily services to nearly all major destinations, including international services.

Manuel Tienda León (☎0810-888-5366; www.tiendaleon.com.ar; San Lorenzo 935) offers a direct service to or from Buenos Aires' international airport for AR\$250. It does pickups from hotel.

Train

From **Rosario Norte train station** (Av del Valle 2750; www.tbanet.com.ar), unreliable services to Buenos Aires (AR\$50, six to eight hours) leave at 10:50pm Monday to Friday, returning at 2:30pm. There are four other weekly trains run by **Ferrocenral** (www.ferrocenral.com.ar, tickets AR\$21-54) that stop here en route between Buenos Aires and Córdoba, and Buenos Aires and Tucumán (see p249), a more interesting trip.

Take bus 138 from San Juan and Mitre to the station.

BUSES FROM ROSARIO

DESTINATION	COST (AR\$)	DURATION (HR)
Buenos Aires	122	4
Córdoba	132	7
Corrientes	238	11
Mendoza	265	11
Paraná	56	2
Posadas	322	16
Resistencia	245	10
Salta	296	16
Santa Fe	50	2
Santiago del Estero	196	10
Tucumán	239	12

Getting Around

To/from the Airport

To get to the airport, 8km west of town, take a *remise* (taxi), which costs around AR\$50 or AR\$60. One operator is **Primera Clase** (☎454-5454).

Bicycle

To rent a bike, head to Rosario Bike, Kayak & Motor Boat Tours (p146), which has well-equipped town bikes for AR\$50/60 per half-day/day or AR\$220 per week. You'll need your passport and an AR\$150 deposit.

Bus

From the local bus terminal on Plaza Sarmiento, bus services run virtually everywhere (see www.rosariobus.com.ar). Have the AR\$2 fare in exact change; otherwise buy a *tarjeta magnética* (magnetic bus card) from any kiosk (AR\$3.80/10.80 for two/six trips). To get to the city center from the long-distance terminal, take a bus marked 'Centro' or 'Plaza Sarmiento'. It's about AR\$15 to AR\$20 in a taxi.

Santa Fe

☎0342 / POP 525,093

There's quite a contrast between Santa Fe's relaxed center, where colonial buildings age gracefully in the humid heat and nobody seems to get beyond an amble, and a Friday night in the Recoleta district where university students in dozens of bars show the night no mercy. Capital of its province, but with a small-town feel, Santa Fe is an excellent place to visit for a day or two.

Santa Fe de la Veracruz (its full title) was moved here in 1651 from its original location at Cayastá, 75km to the north. The first Santa Fe was founded in 1573 by Juan de Garay, but by the mid-17th century the location proved intolerable for the original Spanish settlers. Wearing by constant raids by indigenous people, floods and isolation, they packed up the place and moved it to its current location on a tributary of the Río Paraná. Several picturesque colonial buildings remain.

In 1853 Argentina's first constitution was ratified by an assembly that met here, which is a source of great pride to the city. These days Santa Fe's ambitious new riverfront rehabilitation has added extra appeal to this historic city.

Santa Fe's remaining colonial buildings are within a short walk of Plaza 25 de Mayo, the town's functional center. Av San Martín, north of the plaza, is the major commercial street and part of it forms an attractive *peatonal* (pedestrian district) with palm trees and terraces.



To the east, a bridge crosses the river, then a tunnel beneath the Paraná connects Santa Fe with its twin city of Paraná in Entre Ríos.

Sights

Convento y Museo de San Francisco

MONASTERY

(Amenábar 2257; admission by donation; ☎8am-noon & 4-7pm Oct-Feb, 3:30-6:30pm Mar-Sep, closed Sun except for church) The principal historical landmark is this Franciscan monastery and museum, built in 1680. The walls, which are more than 1m thick, support a roof made from Paraguayan cedar and hardwood beams held together by fittings and wooden spikes, rather than by nails. While the museum section is mediocre, the church is beautiful, with an exquisite wooden ceiling and a fine polychrome Christ by the grumpy Spanish master Alonso Cano – it was sent as a sympathy gift to Santa Fe by

Santa Fe

Top Sights

- Convento y Museo de San FranciscoA7
- Museo Etnográfico y Colonial ProvincialA7
- Museo Histórico Provincial.....A7

Sights

- 1 Casa de GobiernoA7
- 2 Catedral.....A6
- 3 Iglesia de la CompañíaA6

Activities, Courses & Tours

- 4 Costa LitoralB4

Sleeping

- 5 Hostel Santa Fe de la Veracruz.....A3
- 6 Hostel Santa Fe.....B1
- 7 Hotel Conquistador.....B3
- 8 Hotel Constituyentes.....B3
- 9 Hotel Emperatriz.....B3
- 10 Hotel España.....A3
- 11 Hotel Galeón.....B3
- 12 Hotel Royal.....B3
- 13 Hotel Zavaleta.....B3
- 14 Los Silos.....B4

Eating

- 15 Círculo Italiano.....B3
- 16 Club Social Sirio Libanés.....B3
- 17 El Brigadier.....A6
- 18 Las Delicias.....A3
- 19 Merengo.....A6
- Restaurante España.....(see 10)

the Queen of Spain when the town moved in 1649. Note also the tomb of Padre Magallanes, a priest who was killed by a jaguar that took refuge in the church when it was driven from the shores of the Paraná during the floods of 1825. The cloister has a carved wooden balustrade and is redolent with the perfume of flowers. The monastery is still home to one monk, who is helped out by a trio of priests.

Museo Histórico Provincial MUSEUM
(www.museohistorico-sfe.gov.ar; Av San Martín 1490; admission AR\$2; ☎8:30am-noon & 3-7:30pm Tue-Fri, 4:30-7:30pm Sat & Sun) In a lovable 17th-century building, this museum has a variety of possessions and mementos of various provincial governors and caudillos (provincial strongmen), as well as some religious art and fine period furnishings, including a sedan chair once used to carry around the Viceroy of Río de la Plata.

Museo Etnográfico y Colonial Provincial MUSEUM
(25 de Mayo 1470; admission AR\$2; ☎8:30am-noon & 2-7pm Tue-Fri, 4-7pm Sat & Sun) Run with heartwarming enthusiasm, this museum has a chronological display of stone tools, Guaraní ceramics, jewelry, carved bricks and colonial objects. Highlights include a set of *tablas* – a colonial game similar to backgammon – and a scale model of the original Santa Fe.

Plaza 25 de Mayo SQUARE
The center of colonial Santa Fe is a peaceful square framed by many fine buildings. The vast **Casa de Gobierno** (government house) was built in 1909 and replaced the demolished colonial *cabildo* (town council building), seat of the 1852 constitutional assembly. On the square's east side, the exterior simplicity of the Jesuit **Iglesia de la Compañía** masks an ornate interior. Dating from 1696, it's the province's best-preserved colonial church. On the square's north side the city's **catedral** (cathedral) is a little underwhelming by comparison, and dates from the mid-18th century.

Tours
Costa Litoral BOAT TOURS
(☎456-4381; www.costalitoral.net; Dique 1) From the redeveloped harbor area, a large catamaran runs weekend trips around the river islands (adult/child AR\$46/28, two hours, 11am Saturday and Sunday) or to Paraná

(Sat & Sun; adult/child AR\$75/40, 5½ hours, 2pm Saturday and Sunday) and back, with a couple of hours to explore the city. Book tickets in the bar opposite the dock.

Sleeping

The area around the bus terminal is the budget hotel zone. Many hotels offer a discount for cash payment.

Los Silos HOTEL \$\$\$
(☎450-2800; www.hotellossilos.com.ar; Dique 1; s/d AR\$479/536; ☎☎☎☎☎) Santa Fe's decaying waterfront has been significantly smartened up in the last few years, and this excellent hotel is the star. Brilliantly converted from grain silos, it features original, rounded rooms with marvelous views and plenty of modern comfort. The vistas from the rooftop pool, spa and sundeck are even better, and service is excellent throughout. A handsome cafe and play area for kids, with console games and minigolf, are other highlights; there's also an attached casino.

Hotel Galeón HOTEL \$\$\$
(☎454-1788; www.hotelgaleon.com.ar; Belgrano 2759; s/d AR\$245/300; ☎☎☎) Bright, unusual, and all curved surfaces and weird angles, this cheery place is a breath of fresh air. There's a variety of room types, none of which is a conventional shape; the beds are seriously comfortable and the bathrooms pleasant. It's handy for the bus, too.

Hotel Emperatriz HOTEL \$\$\$
(☎453-0061; emperatrizhotel.wordpress.com; Irigoyen Freyre 2440; s/d AR\$150/200; ☎☎) With a decayed but noble façade and other-era fittings, this hotel seems to have slipped under the radar of the 21st century. The rooms are small and not luxurious – there are various sizes and prices – but they're clean and comfortable enough for this price. It's a slice of old-time Argentina that won't be around in a few years' time.

Hotel Conquistador HOTEL \$\$\$
(☎400-1195; www.lineaverdedehoteles.com.ar; 25 de Mayo 2676; s/d AR\$440/510; ☎☎☎☎) The Conquistador lays on the charm, with sauna, hydromassage, fluffy bathrobes, gymnasium and a huge buffet breakfast. The beds in the twins and singles are happily queen-sized. The pool is outdoor, so only open in summer. Slightly cheaper rooms at the **Hotel España** across the road give you access to the same facilities.

Hostal Santa Fe de la Veracruz HOTEL \$\$\$
(☎455-1740; www.hostalsf.com; Av San Martín 2954; s/d AR\$286/370; ☎☎☎) Decorated with indigenous motifs, this hotel offers spacious superior rooms and decent standards. It'll soon be time for redecorating though – those dozen shades of beige are looking a little dated. *Siesta* fans will love the 6pm checkout.

Hostel Santa Fe HOSTEL \$
(☎455-4000; www.santafe-hostel.com; Blvd Gálvez 2173; dm/d AR\$55/180; ☎☎) Tucked behind a tour agency called *Latitud Sur*, this hostel has two airless but not-too-crowded dorms with lockers, and a private double. There's also a small pool and it's very handy for the Recoleta nightlife.

Hotel Constituyentes HOTEL \$
(☎452-1586; www.hotelconstituyentes.com.ar; San Luis 2862; s/d with bathroom AR\$180/250, without bathroom AR\$100/160; ☎☎☎) Spacious rooms and proximity to the bus terminal are the main drawcards of this relaxed place. Rooms at the front suffer from street noise. Breakfast is a few pesos extra.

Hotel Zavaleta HOTEL \$\$\$
(☎455-1841; www.zavaletahotel.com.ar; Hipólito Yrigoyen 2349; s/d standard AR\$250/340, superior AR\$310/380; ☎☎☎) A welcoming plaza-side hotel near the bus terminal. Standard rooms are small.

Hotel Royal HOTEL \$
(☎452-7359; Irigoyen Freyre 2256; r without bathroom AR\$100) Basic but clean. Many mattresses have given up the ghost, so ask to see a few rooms. Cheap and near the bus terminal...it'll do for a night.

Eating

The best zones for cheap eats are across from the bus terminal, and the nightlife zone of La Recoleta (see Drinking).

El Quincho de Chiquito FISH \$\$\$
(enr Brown & Obispo Vieytes; set menu AR\$63) This legendary place is a local institution, and the place to go to eat river fish. It's on the *costanera* some 6km north of downtown. There are few frills to the service, and no choice about the menu: four or five courses of delicious surubí, sábalo or pacu are brought out to you. You won't leave hungry. Drinks are extra but cheap. It's around AR\$25 each way in a taxi (staff will call you one to take you back) or catch bus 16 from any point on the waterfront road.

Club Social Sirio Libanés MIDDLE EASTERN \$\$\$
(25 de Mayo 2740; meals AR\$22-55; ☎Tue-Sun) In a rather aristocratic dining room, attentive waiters serve well-prepared Middle Eastern-style dishes; it's a pleasingly unusual place to eat. You enter down the end of a passageway.

Círculo Italiano ITALIAN \$\$\$
(Hipólito Yrigoyen 2457; mains AR\$35-55) Part of the Italian social club, *Círculo Italiano* prepares good, moderately priced lunch specials (AR\$41 to AR\$50 Monday to Friday) and tasty pasta. Come for the ritzy atmosphere, the waiters in linen jackets, the complimentary pâté or the extensive wine list.

Las Delicias CAFE, BAKERY \$
(Av San Martín 2882; cakes & pastries from AR\$4; ☎8am-midnight) Delightfully old-fashioned and elegant, with a great shady terrace, this bakery offers some of the most sinful pastries and cakes imaginable; it also does breakfast, afternoon tea and sandwiches. Service is traditional and correct.

Restaurante España ARGENTINE \$\$\$
(Av San Martín 2644; mains AR\$35-80; ☎) This hotel restaurant has a huge menu that covers the range of fish (both locally caught and from the sea), steaks, pasta, chicken and crepes, with a few Spanish dishes thrown in to justify the name. The wine list is a winner, too.

El Brigadier ARGENTINE \$\$\$
(Av San Martín 1670; mains AR\$28-64) Half a block from Plaza 25 de Mayo, this refurbished restaurant offers an elegant interior and tasty cuts of meat and river fish that win out, despite a few strange quirks in the service department.

Merengo BAKERY \$
(Av General López 2634; alfajores from AR\$3) In 1851 Merengo stuck two biscuits together with *dulce de leche* (milk caramel) and invented the *alfajor*, now Argentina's favorite snack. They're still going strong; delicious.

Drinking & Entertainment

Santa Fe's nightlife centers on the intersection of 25 de Mayo and Santiago del Estero, the heart of the area known as La Recoleta, which goes wild on weekend nights – a crazy contrast to the sedate pace of life downtown. Places change name and popularity rapidly, so just head to the zone and take a

look around the dozens of bars and clubs. Many have a cover charge redeemable for a drink.

The city's best football team, **Colón** (☎459-8025; www.clubcolon.com.ar), is in the top division. It plays at the **Brigadier Estanislao López stadium** (cnr Dr Zavalla & Pi-etranera), where you can also pick up tickets.

i Information

Telephone and internet shops are all over, including in the bus terminal. Several banks with ATMs can be found along the *peatonal*.

Hospital Provincial José María Cullen (☎457-3340; Av Freyre 2150)

Municipal tourist office (☎457-4124; www.santafeturismo.gov.ar; Belgrano 2910; ☎7am-8pm) In the bus terminal.

Provincial tourist office (☎458-9476; www.turismo-santafe.org.ar; cnr Amenábar & Av San Martín; ☎7am-6pm Mon & Wed-Thu, 7am-1pm Tue & Fri) Helpful office for provincial exploration.

i Getting There & Away

Aerolíneas Argentinas (☎0810-222-86527; 25 de Mayo 2287) has five weekly flights to Buenos Aires (AR\$430). **Sol** (☎0810-444-4765; www.sol.com.ar) flies the same route Monday to Saturday (AR\$348) and also services Rosario. The airport is 7km south of town on RN 11. A *remise* will cost about AR\$35.

From the **bus terminal** (☎457-4124; www.terminalsantafe.com; Belgrano 2910) there are bus services throughout the country.

BUSES FROM SANTA FE

DESTINATION	COST (ARS)	DURATION (HR)
Buenos Aires	168	6
Córdoba	105	5
Corrientes	189	9
Mendoza	320	13
Paraná	4	40min
Paso de los Libres	110	9
Posadas	295	14
Resistencia	180	9
Rosario	50	2
Salta	406	16
Tucumán	256	11

Cayastá

A fascinating day trip from Santa Fe takes you to that city's original location, the **Cayastá ruins** (Santa Fe la Vieja; admission AR\$2; ☎9am-1pm & 3-7pm Tue-Fri, 10am-1pm & 4-7pm Sat & Sun), picturesquely set beside the Río San Javier, which has actually eroded away a good portion of them.

There's ongoing archaeological excavation and conservation here (and a campaign for Unesco status underway), but the most fascinating find by far has been the **Iglesia de San Francisco**. The Spanish and mestizo inhabitants of old Santa Fe were buried directly beneath the earth-floored church, and nearly 100 graves have been excavated, including those of Hernando Arias de Saavedra (known as 'Hermandarias'), the first locally born governor of Río de la Plata province, and his wife, Gerónima de Contrera, daughter of Juan de Garay, who founded Santa Fe and Buenos Aires.

You can also see the remains of two other churches and the *cabildo* (town council), as well as a reconstructed period house. Near the entrance to the site is an attractive and excellent **museum** housing the finds from the site, including some fine indigenous pottery with parrot and human motifs.

Last entry is strictly one hour before closing.

There's a mediocre restaurant at the site and a couple of decent *parrillas* in town. Several spots offer simple lodgings and boat trips on the river. **Cabañas Cayastá** (☎03405-493300; www.cayasta.com; cabin for 2/4 people AR\$450/570; ☎☎) is a riverside resort offering cabin accommodation and a spa.

Cayastá is 76km northeast of Santa Fe on RP 1. Paraná Medio bus company departs regularly from Santa Fe's bus terminal (AR\$16, 1½ hours). Ask the driver to drop you at '*las ruinas*', 1km short of Cayastá itself.

Paraná

☎0343 / POP 270,968

Unpretentious Paraná seems surprised at its own status as capital of Entre Ríos province. Perched on the hilly banks of its eponymous river, it's a sleepy, slow-paced city. The nicest part of town is the riverside where a pretty park slopes down to the *costanera*, where there are beaches, bars, boat trips and hundreds of strollers and joggers. After the defeat of Rosas at the battle of Caseros, Paraná

was the capital of the Argentine Confederation (which didn't include Buenos Aires) from 1853 to 1861.

A tunnel beneath the main channel of the Paraná connects the city to Santa Fe.

i Sights & Activities

Museo Histórico

de Entre Ríos MUSEUM (Buenos Aires 286; admission AR\$2; ☎8am-12:30pm & 3-8pm Tue-Fri, 9am-noon & 5-7pm Sat, 9am-noon Sun) Flaunting local pride, this modern museum on Plaza Alvear contains information on the short-lived Republic of Entre Ríos and the battle of Monte Camp-eros, as well as *mate* paraphernalia and numerous solid wooden desks and portraits of Urquiza. Much of it was the collection of a local poet.

FREE Museo y Mercado

Provincial de Artesanías HANDICRAFTS (Av Urquiza 1239; ☎8am-1pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri, 11am-1pm Sat, 9am-noon Sun) Promoting handicrafts from throughout the province, this is a likable little place. Ask the curator to explain things to you; you'll be amazed at the intricacy of some of the work, like the hats made from tightly woven palm fibers.

Similar traditional *artesanías* (handicrafts) are on display and sale at the **Centro de Artesanos** (cnr Av 9 de Julio & Carbó), under renovation at time of research.

Costanera

RIVER BEACH

From the northern edge of downtown, Parque Urquiza slopes steeply downward to the banks of the Río Paraná. During the summer months the waterfront fills with people strolling, fishing and swimming.

There's a stretch of beach west of the **Paraná Rowing Club** (☎431-2048; www.paranarowingclub.com.ar) at which, for AR\$50 per day, you can access facilities, including a private beach and showers (AR\$80 including swimming pool). There's also a cafe-restaurant on the water.

A better beach, **Playas de Thompson**, is 1km further east, beyond the port.

Museo de Bellas Artes

GALLERY

(Buenos Aires 355; admission variable; ☎9am-noon & 3-8pm Tue-Fri, 10am-noon & 4-7pm Sat, 10am-noon Sun) A small permanent collection of oils, illustrations and sculptures by provincial artists is complemented by temporary exhibitions in this gallery on Plaza Alvear.

i Tours

Costa Litoral

BOAT TOURS

(☎423-4385; www.costalitoral.net; Buenos Aires 212) At weekends, runs afternoon trips to Santa Fe and one-hour cruises on the river (AR\$35) in a large catamaran.

Paraná en Kayak

KAYAK

(☎422-7143; www.paranakenkayak.com.ar) Offers easy kayak trips on the river as well as longer routes.

i Sleeping

TOP CHOICE Las Mañanitas

HOTEL \$

(☎421-8324; www.lasmanianitas.com.ar; Carbó 62; s/d AR\$140/210; ☎☎☎☎) There's a summer-house feel about this delightfully relaxed little place, which has nine rooms alongside a courtyard and garden with pool. The rooms are unremarkable though well priced, but it's the light style and grace of the whole ensemble that makes this a winner.

Maran Suites

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎423-5444; www.maran.com.ar; cnr Alameda de la Federación & Mitre; s AR\$430, d AR\$575-610; ☎☎☎☎) Towering over the western end of Parque Urquiza, this sleek modern hotel has a rare combination of style and warmhearted personal service. Try to get a room as high up as possible, for city or river views. All the rooms are very spacious and decorated with flair; the 'presidential' suites (AR\$1423) are big enough to get lost in and boast a Jacuzzi with memorable vistas over the water.

Paraná Hotel Plaza Jardín

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎423-1700; www.hotelesparana.com.ar; Av 9 de Julio 60; s/d standard AR\$199/255, superior AR\$298/358; ☎☎☎) Set in a lovely old colonial building, this hotel has a peaceful patio that's great for a break from the midday heat. The superior rooms are much more spacious and stylish: worth the upgrade. It's significantly cheaper outside of summer.

Paraná Hostel

HOSTEL \$

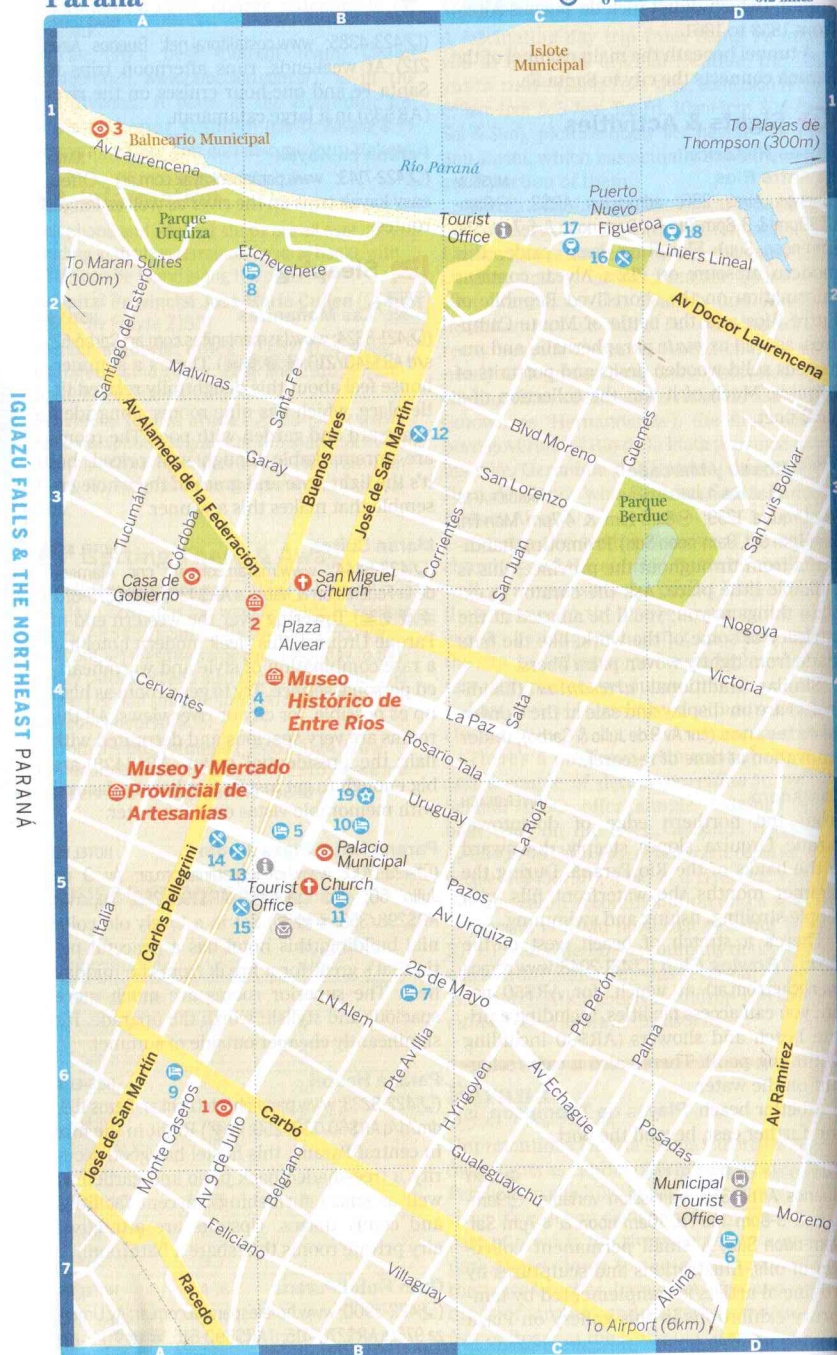
(☎422-8233; www.paranahostel.com.ar; Pazos 159; dm/d/q AR\$60/130/250; ☎☎) Right in the mix in central Paraná, this hostel has good security, a tree-shaded back patio and garden as well as smart furnishings, decent facilities and comfy dorms. Upstairs are attractive, airy private rooms that share a bathroom.

Gran Hotel Paraná

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎422-3900; www.hotelesparana.com.ar; Av Urquiza 976; s AR\$270-415, d AR\$390-515; ☎☎☎) Fine

Paraná



service is a major plus at this large hotel on the main square. There are two grades of room, all recently refurbished and spacious. If you don't mind a bit of traffic noise, try for a balcony on the square. There's a health spa and a high-quality restaurant. Good breakfast buffet.

Hotel Itati

HOTEL \$

(☎423-1500; hoteles_itati@hotmail.com; Belgrano 135; s/d AR\$80/160; 🍷🍷) Welcoming management makes up for the worn carpets and aging sheets at this curiously designed budget hotel. Heating costs a little extra, as does internet use. The dark rooms are fine for the price, with tiny bathrooms.

Howard Johnson

HOTEL \$\$\$

Mayorazgo (☎420-6800; www.hjmayorazgo.com.ar; Etcheve here s/n; r AR\$630-710; 🍷🍷🍷) The long curved facade of this remodeled five-star

dominates the waterfront from above. It has great views from large windows and a casino.

Hotel Bristol

HOTEL \$

(☎431-3961; bristolparana@yahoo.com.ar; Alsina 221; s/d with bathroom AR\$100/140, without bathroom AR\$70/90; 🍷) Right by the bus terminal. Well kept and quiet.

Toma Vieja

CAMPGROUND \$

(☎433-1721; Av Blas Parera; camp sites AR\$20) Scenic site of the old waterworks overlooking the river. Take bus 5 from the bus terminal or bus 1 from the plaza.

Eating**Don Charras**

PARRILLA \$\$

(☎422-5972; www.doncharras.com; cnr José de San Martín & San Lorenzo; mains AR\$35-60; 🍷 Tue-Sun) Thatched and atmospheric, this *parrilla* is a popular Paraná choice. Fridays and Saturdays see special fire-roasted options, but you can enjoy the usual char-grilled selection and solicitous service otherwise. There's also a decent salad bar.

Giovani

ARGENTINE \$\$

(☎423-0527; Av Urquiza 1045; mains AR\$33-70; 🍷) With as-it-should-be service and thoughtful touches such as free coffee, this stylish restaurant in the center of town serves excellent meats from the *parrilla* and delectable pasta. Fish isn't such a strong point.

Flamingo Grand Bar

CAFE \$

(cnr Urquiza & José de San Martín; light meals AR\$15-35; ☺8am-10pm; 🍷) Smart seats and a plaza-side location make this a favorite throughout the day, from morning croissants and juices through to *lomitos* (steak sandwiches) and lunch specials to decent à la carte plates and *picadas* (shared appetizer plates).

Petra

BUFFET \$

(25 de Mayo 32; buffet AR\$42) With a huge range of mostly Chinese food on offer, this redoubtable all-you-can-eat joint sits on the square. Open for both lunch and dinner, with *parrilla* options complementing the hot and cold buffet. Drinks extra.

Quincho del Puerto

FISH \$\$

(Av Doctor Laurencena 350; fish AR\$35-51; 🍷🍷 lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, lunch Sun) Popular spot for river fish just back from the *costanera*. There are various options, including the tasty (but bony) *pacú* and *surubí*.

Paraná**Top Sights**

- Museo Histórico de Entre RíosB4
- Museo y Mercado Provincial de Artesanías.....A5

Sights

- 1 Centro de ArtesanosA6
- 2 Museo de Bellas ArtesB4
- 3 Paraná Rowing Club.....A1

Activities, Courses & Tours

- 4 Costa LitoralB4

Sleeping

- 5 Gran Hotel ParanáB5
- 6 Hotel Bristol.....D7
- 7 Hotel ItatiB6
- 8 Howard Johnson MayorazgoB2
- 9 Las MañanitasA6
- 10 Paraná Hostel.....B5
- 11 Paraná Hotel Plaza JardínB5

Eating

- 12 Don CharrasB3
- 13 Flamingo Grand BarA5
- 14 Giovani.....A5
- 15 Petra.....A5
- 16 Quincho del Puerto.....C2

Drinking

- 17 FishC2
- 18 Ku-vaD2

Entertainment

- 19 Cream.....B5



Drinking & Entertainment

Paraná is quiet midweek, but gets busier on Friday and Saturday nights. Most of the action is at the eastern end of the riverfront.

Fish

(Figuroa s/n; ☺Fri & Sat) Plays the usual mix of mainstream *marcha*, house and salsa.

BAR, NIGHTCLUB

Ku-va

(www.ku-vaparana.com.ar; cnr Güemes & Liniers Lineal; ☺Fri & Sat) This place offers plenty of atmosphere in an attractive old post office building.

BAR

Cream

(www.creamparana.com.ar; Uruguay 190; ☺Thu-Sat) Here you'll feel ancient if you're over 30.

NIGHTCLUB

Information

There are several banks with ATMs within a couple of blocks of Plaza 1 de Mayo. Dozens of places offer internet access and phone calls.

Hospital San Martín (☎423-4545; www.hospital.sanmartin.org.ar; Presidente Perón 450)

Tourist office (☎423-0183; www.turismoenparana.gov.ar; Pl 1 de Mayo s/n; ☺8am-8pm) Helpful, with good brochures. There's another branch by the river, and a desk in the bus station.

Getting There & Around

The airport is 6km south of town, accessible only by *remise* (AR\$35). **LAER** (☎0810-777-5237; www.laersa.com.ar) flies to BA on weekdays.

The **bus terminal** (☎422-1282; Av Ramírez) is opposite Plaza Martín Fierro. Buses 1, 4, 5 and 9 run between the terminal and the town center. Paraná is a hub for provincial bus services, but Santa Fe is more convenient for long-distance trips. Buses leave every 30 minutes for Santa Fe (AR\$4, 40 minutes).

BUSES FROM PARANÁ

DESTINATION	COST (ARS)	DURATION (HR)
Buenos Aires	145	6½
Colón	46	4-5
Concordia	50	4-5
Córdoba	110	6
Corrientes	195	10
Guauguaychú	52	4-5
Paso de los Libres	114	6
Rosario	56	3

Corrientes

☎0379 / POP 358,223

Stately Corrientes sits below the confluence of the Paraná and Paraguay rivers just across the water from its twin city, Resistencia. One of the nation's most venerable cities, it has elegant balconied buildings dating from the turn of the 20th century that lend a time-worn appeal to its colorful streets. Like many such cities, the *costanera* is everybody's destination of choice for strolling, licking ice creams or sipping *mate* with friends.

Corrientes is a magnet for regional indigenous crafts; Guaraní culture has a strong presence. The city is famous for both its Carnaval and for being the setting of Graham Greene's novel *The Honorary Consul*.

Corrientes was originally called Vera de los Siete Corrientes, after its founder Juan Torres de Vera y Aragón and the shifting *corrientes* (currents) of the Paraná. During colonial times Corrientes suffered repeated indigenous uprisings before establishing itself as the first Spanish settlement in the region.

Sights & Activities

Various operators run boat trips on the Paraná; the tourist office has a list.

FREE Museo de Artesanías Tradicionales Folclóricas

MUSEUM

(Quintana 905; ☺8am-9pm Mon-Sat) This intriguing museum is set in a converted colonial house with an interior courtyard. There are two small displays of fine traditional *artesanía* (handicrafts) as well as a good shop selling craft products, but the highlight is watching students being taught to work leather, silver, bone and wood by master craftspeople. Other rooms around the courtyard are occupied by working artisans who will sell to you directly. The museum guides are enthusiastic and friendly.

FREE Museo Histórico de Corrientes

MUSEUM

(9 de Julio 1044; ☺8am-noon & 2-8pm Tue-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) This museum is set around an attractive patio and exhibits weapons, antique furniture, coins and items dealing with religious and civil history. It's a little bit higgledy-piggledy, but staff are proud of the exhibition and keen to chat. The room on the War of the Triple Alliance is the most interesting.

CHAMAMÉ

Tango? What's that? Up here it's all about *chamamé*, one of the country's most intoxicating musical forms. Rooted in the polka, which was introduced by European immigrants, it is also heavily influenced by the music and language of the indigenous Guaraní. Its definitive sound is the accordion, which is traditionally accompanied by the guitar, the *guitarrón* (an oversized guitar used for playing bass lines), the larger *bandoneón* (accordion) and the *contrabajo* (double bass). Of course, a *conjunto* (band) is hardly complete without a singer or two.

Chamamé is as much a dance as it is a musical genre, and it's a lively one. It is a dance for a couple, except when the man takes his solo *zapateo* (tap dance). Corrientes province is the heart of *chamamé* and is therefore the easiest place to find a live performance. Sitting in on an evening of music and dancing – or taking to the floor if you're brave – is one of the joys unique to the province.

Check out the Spanish-only website www.corrienteschamame.com.ar for details of performances, and online tunes to introduce you to the genre.

Convento de San Francisco

MONASTERY

(Mendoza 450) This colonial monastery dates from the city's founding, and was beautifully restored in 1939. The small colonnade is modeled on Bernini's at St Peter's in Rome, and the monastery has its own **museum** (admission free; ☺8am-noon & 5-9pm Mon-Fri), with religious art and artifacts.

FREE Teatro Juan de Vera

THEATRE

(San Juan 637) A striking belle époque building; ask at the ticket office if you can have a peek inside to see the beautiful treble-galleried theater and its painted ceiling. The eupola retracts when management fancies a starlit performance.

Festivals & Events

Corrientes' traditionally riotous **Carnaval Correntino** competes with Guauguaychú's for the title of the country's best. Celebrated Friday through Sunday on the last three weekends in February and the first weekend of March, Carnaval's parades along the *costanera* attract participants from neighboring provinces and countries, with huge crowds.

Sleeping

Corrientes has some great places to stay. During Carnaval, the provincial tourist office can help out with lodging in family homes. Many Corrientes hotels offer a 10% discount for paying cash.

TOP CHOICE La Alondra

BOUTIQUE HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎443-0555; www.laalondra.com.ar; Av 3 de Abril 127; tw/ste AR\$490/550; ☺☺☺) Sumptuously furnished with dark-wood antiques, this

wonderfully renovated house is an oasis of relaxation from the unappealing main road. Most of the seven rooms that surround a small finger-shaped pool are suites boasting plush king-sized beds and characterful bathrooms fitted with claw-foot tubs. Wonderfully handsome public areas and classy service add up to a most impressive package. There are often deals below the prices quoted here.

TOP CHOICE Bienvenida Golondrina

HOSTEL \$

(☎443-5316; www.bienvenidagolondrina.com; La Rioja 455; dm AR\$65-70; ☺☺☺) Occupying a 14th-century centenary building, all high ceilings, stained glass, and artistic flourishes, this hostel makes a great base a few steps from the *costanera*. Comfortable wideberthed dorm beds have headroom, facilities are great, and the warmly welcoming management couldn't be more helpful.

Turismo Hotel Casino

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎446-2244; www.turismohotelcasino.com.ar; Entre Ríos 650; r AR\$506, ste AR\$612-1118; ☺☺☺☺) By the casino on the riverfront, this stately old place has had a complete refit. It's now an excellent hotel, with modern rooms that are huge, elegantly and artistically furnished, but cozy and quiet. It doesn't cost much to upgrade to a sizeable suite; other drawcards include the big pool with plenty of chaise longues and spa facilities.

La Rozada

BOUTIQUE HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎443-3001; www.larozada.com; Plácido Martínez 1223; r AR\$440-575; ☺☺☺) An excellent option near the riverfront, this has commodious apartments and suites set in the tower in the courtyard of an appealing 19th-century,

battleship-gray historic building. Fine views are on offer from most rooms – a balcony room is slightly more expensive – and there's an attractive bar-restaurant. Guests can use the pool at the nearby rowing club.

Astro Apart Hotel

HOTEL \$\$
(☎446-6112; www.astroapart.com; Bolívar 1285; s/d AR\$260/320; 🏠📶) Top value is to be had at this new place, which features sizeable, handsome white rooms with great beds and large windows. They come with a simple kitchen and offer plenty of handy facilities as reasonably priced extras.

Corrientes Plaza Hotel

HOTEL \$\$\$
(☎446-6500; www.hotel-corrientes.com.ar; Junín 1549; s/d AR\$230/310; 🏠📶) A good deal on the square in the heart of modern Corrientes, the Plaza has spacious, faultless modern rooms with LCD television and most with minibar. Staff are friendly and there's a good breakfast spread.

Orly Hotel

HOTEL \$\$\$
(☎442-0280; www.hotelorlycorrientes.com.ar; San Juan 867; standard s/d AR\$226/289, superior r AR\$480; 🏠📶) Spruce and spotless, this professional and attractive three-star job overlooks a small plaza. It's divided in two; the older standard rooms are fine but smallish, and wi-fi doesn't reach all of them. The superiors are great, with huge beds, modish couches and good bathrooms.

Hotel Victoria

HOTEL \$
(☎443-5547; hotelvictoria1@hotmail.com; Av España 1050; s/d AR\$155/200; 🏠📶) This is one of two decent adjacent budget choices near Plaza JB Cabral. The doubles are far better than the twins or poky singles.

Eating

Look out for *mbaipú*, a traditional *correntino* dish of fried beef and onions topped with toasted flour and cheese.

TOP CHOICE Enófilos

ARGENTINE \$\$\$
(☎443-9271; Junín 1260; mains AR\$50-75; 🍷📶) An *enófilo* is a wine-lover, so the cellar gets plenty of attention at this attentive upstairs restaurant on the *peatonal*. The wine 'list' is displayed in a small temple at the room's center; traditional *correntino* ingredients such as succulent surubí river fish are given creative flair, and fine cuts of meat are showcased to great advantage with exquisite sauces and fresh vegetables. It's a great place to get off the pizza, pasta and *parrilla* treadmill. There's a set menu available on weekdays for AR\$68.

Martha de Bianchetti

CAFE, BAKERY \$
(cnr 9 de Julio & Mendoza; pastries from AR\$5; ☎8am-1pm & 4-11pm Mon-Sat) This old-fashioned Italian-style bakery and cafe serves mind-altering pastries and excellent coffee; each cup comes with *chipacitos* (small cheese pastries). All the yummy treats are warm when the doors open.

La Costa

ARGENTINE \$\$\$
(cnr Costanera & 9 de Julio; mains AR\$30-60; ☎Tue-Sun) On the *costanera* – walk a block beyond the casino to find it – this two-level

modern place has a buzzy atmosphere, and serves a wide variety of Argentine dishes, including great *parrillada*. It's popular in the evenings, but you'll appreciate the river views from the floor-to-ceiling windows more over lunch.

El Quincho

PARRILLA \$\$\$
(cnr Pujol & Roca; parrillada for 2 AR\$98-119) Rustic and welcoming, this Corrientes classic sits on a roundabout a short walk east of the center. El Quincho is more about Argentine grill classics such as chorizo and *morcilla* (blood sausage) than fancy cuts of steak; there's always a deal on *parrilla* including drinks and dessert that comes out cheaper than the price we've listed here.

Drinking & Entertainment

The area near the intersection of Junín and Buenos Aires contains several bars and clubs pumping along at weekends. The *costanera* also receives some action, with several bars and *boliches* (nightclubs) in the Costanera Sur zone south of the bridge to Resistencia.

Parrilla Puente Pexoa

TRADITIONAL MUSIC
(☎445-1687; RN 12 at Virgen de Itatí roundabout; ☎from 8:30pm Fri & Sat) Corrientes is the heartland of the lively music and dance known as *chamamé* (p159), and seeing a live performance is memorable. This relaxed restaurant features *chamamé* dances every weekend and it can be outrageous fun when the dancing starts. Men and women show up in full gaucho regalia, and up to four *conjuntos* (bands) may play each night, usually starting around 11pm. You can get here via a taxi (around AR\$30) or grab bus 102. Make sure you specify it's the *parrilla* you're going to, as Puente Pexoa itself is a place further away.

Shopping

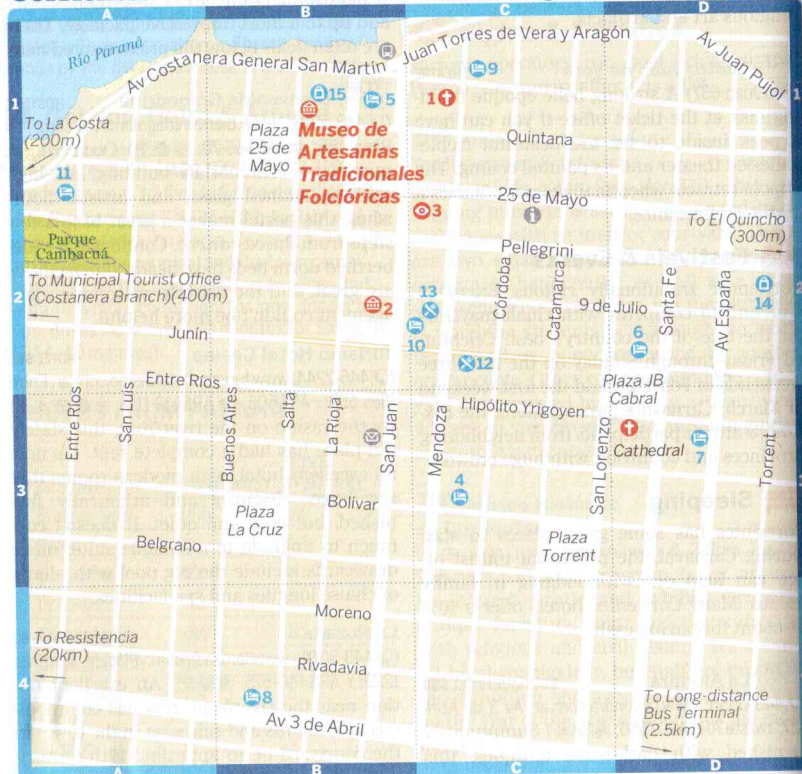
Museo de Artesanías Tradicionales Folclóricas

HANDICRAFTS.
(Quintana 905; ☎8am-noon & 4-9pm Mon-Sat) The shop, which is attached to this museum sells a wide variety of traditional handicrafts.

La Casa de Chamamé

MUSIC
(Pellegrini 1790) This CD shop specializes in Corrientes' roots music, plus you can listen before you buy.

Corrientes



Corrientes

Top Sights

- Museo de Artesanías
- Tradicionales Folclóricas.....B1

Sights

- 1 Convento de San Francisco.....C1
- 2 Museo Histórico de Corrientes.....B2
- 3 Teatro Juan de Vera.....C2

Sleeping

- 4 Astro Apart Hotel.....C3
- 5 Bienvenida Golondrina.....B1
- 6 Corrientes Plaza Hotel.....D2
- 7 Hotel Victoria.....D3
- 8 La Alondra.....B4
- 9 La Rozada.....C1
- 10 Orly Hotel.....C2
- 11 Turismo Hotel Casino.....A1

Eating

- 12 Enófilos.....C2
- 13 Martha de Bianchetti.....C2

Shopping

- 14 La Casa de Chamamé.....D2
- 15 Museo de Artesanías Tradicionales Folclóricas.....B1

BUSES FROM CORRIENTES

DESTINATION	COST (ARS)	DURATION (HR)
Buenos Aires	298	13
Córdoba	289	12
Mercedes	59	3
Paraná	195	10
Paso de los Libres	90	6
Posadas	101	4
Puerto Iguazú	198	9
Rosario	238	11
Salta	268	14
Santa Fe	189	9

i Information

Locutorios (private telephone offices) and internet places are easy to find. There are many banks with ATMs on 9 de Julio between La Rioja and Córdoba.

Municipal tourist office (☎447-4733; www.ciudaddecorrientes.gov.ar; bus terminal; ☹7am-10pm) Other branch on the Costanera at the end of 9 de Julio.

Provincial tourist office (☎442-7200; www.turismocorrientes.gov.ar; 25 de Mayo 1330; ☹8am-2pm, 3-9pm) The most helpful.

i Getting There & Away

Aerolíneas Argentinas (☎442-3918; Junín 1301) flies from Corrientes airport to Buenos Aires daily, and three times weekly to Asunción, Paraguay. It also flies to both destinations from nearby Resistencia.

The **long-distance bus terminal** (☎441-4839; Av Maipú 2400) is 3km east of the center. Nearby Resistencia has better long-distance bus connections to the west and northwest. Buses to Resistencia (AR\$2.50, 40 minutes) leave frequently from the **local bus terminal** (cnr Av Costanera General San Martín & La Rioja). Faster are the shared taxis that zip you into Resistencia for AR\$7. They leave from the same intersection, and also from the corner of Av 3 de Abril and Santa Fe.

i Getting Around

Local bus 105 (AR\$2) goes to the **airport** (☎445-8684), about 10km east of town on RN 12. Bus 6 runs between the local bus terminal and the long-distance bus terminal on Av Maipú. Bus 103 connects the long-distance bus terminal with downtown; a taxi will cost AR\$15 to AR\$18.

Mercedes

☎03773 / POP 40,667

The main access point for the spectacular Esteros del Iberá wetlands, Mercedes is a rather handsome gaucho town with a mightily easy pace to life. Its claim to fame is the nearby – and completely surreal – roadside shrine to the gaucho Antonio Gil (p163), an enormously popular religious phenomenon.



Manos Correntinas (San Martín 499;

☉Mon-Sat) is a friendly handicrafts gallery and shop that displays the work of a cooperative of local craftspeople.

🛏 Sleeping & Eating

Hotel Sol

HOTEL \$

(☎420283; San Martín 519; s/d AR\$120/200; 🏠🚰) Situated two blocks down from the plaza, this welcoming spot is built around a stunning patio: a riot of plants, birdsong and gleaming chessboard tiles. The high-ceilinged old rooms opening off it are good for the price; there are also very attractive modern rooms (double AR\$260) up at the back.

Hotel Itá Pucú

HOTEL \$

(☎421015; Batalla de Salta 645; r per person AR\$75; 🏠🚰🚰) Round the corner from Hotel Sol, this friendly low-roofed hotel has a sort of spaghetti-western feel, and OK rooms that open onto a grassy garden. Breakfast is an extra cost.

Hotel Horizontes

HOTEL \$

(☎420489; Gómez 734; s/d AR\$108/164; 🏠🚰) A block from the bus station, this bare but very clean hotel offers good value for comfy rooms with compact bathrooms.

Sabor Único

ARGENTINE \$

(San Martín 518; mains AR\$25-50) Moving to these new premises opposite the Hotel Sol at the time of research, this is the town's best eating option, with usual favorites as well as a couple of more typical *correntino* dishes.

i Information

There's an irregularly attended **tourist information office** at the bus terminal. There's also a helpful independent **information booth** (☹9-11am & 4-7pm Mon-Sat) there, run by the town's HI hostel. If it's closed, head to the hostel itself.

Most services are along San Martín, which links the bus terminal with the plaza.

i Getting There & Away

The **bus terminal** (☎420165; cnr San Martín & Perreyra) is six blocks west of the plaza. Buses run regularly both ways. Destinations include Buenos Aires (AR\$270, 12 hours), Paso de los Libres (AR\$25, three hours), and Corrientes (AR\$60, 3½ hours).

For information about transport to Colonia Pellegrini and the Esteros del Iberá, see p168.

Reserva Provincial Esteros del Iberá

This stunning wetland reserve is home to an abundance of bird and animal life, and is one of the finest places to see wildlife in South America. Although tourism has been increasing substantially in recent years, Esteros del Iberá remains comparatively unspoiled. The main base for visiting the park is the sleepy village of **Colonia Pellegrini**, 120km northeast of Mercedes; it offers a variety of excellent accommodations and trips to the reserve. Rural *estancias* (ranches) in the larger area also make excellent bases.

GAUCHITO GIL

Spend time on the road anywhere in Argentina and you're bound to see at least one roadside shrine surrounded by red flags and votive offerings. These shrines pay homage to Antonio Gil, a Robin Hood-like figure whose shrine and burial place 9km west of Mercedes attracts hundreds of thousands of pilgrims every year.

Little is known for sure about 'El Gauchito,' as he is affectionately known, but many romantic tales have sprung up to fill the gaps. What is known is that he was born in 1847 and joined the army – some versions say to escape the wrath of a local policeman whose fiancée had fallen in love with him – to fight in the War of the Triple Alliance.

Once the war ended, Gil was called up to join the Federalist Army, but went on the run with a couple of other deserters. The trio roamed the countryside, stealing cattle from rich landowners and sharing it with poor villagers, who in turn gave them shelter and protection. The law finally caught up with the gang, and Gil was hung by the feet from the espinillo tree that still stands near his grave, and beheaded.

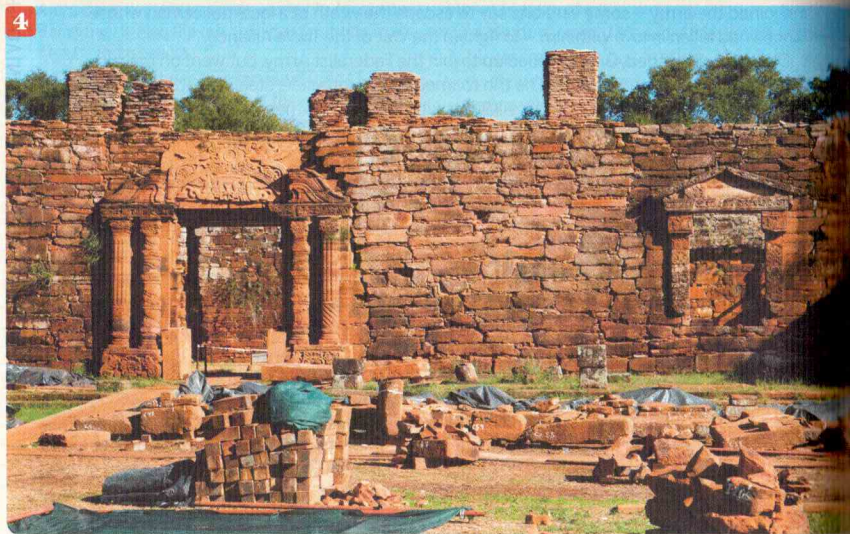
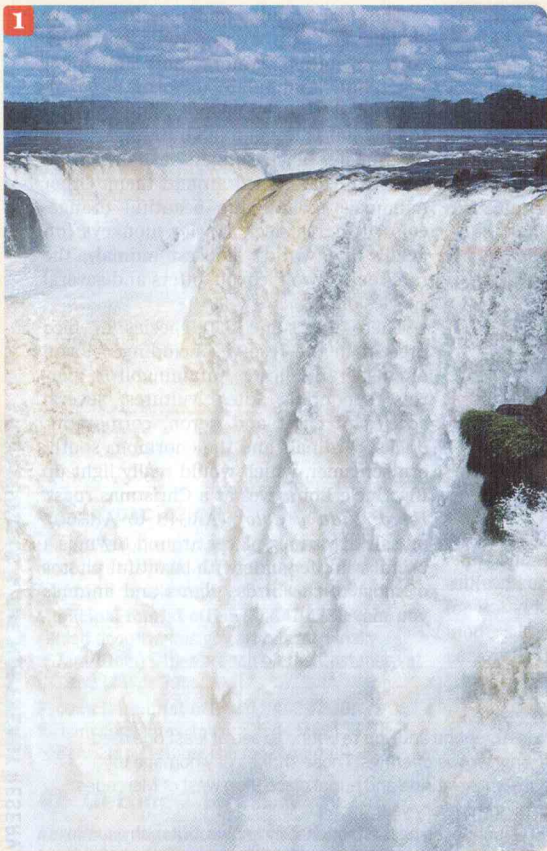
So how did this freeloading, cattle-rustling deserter attain saintlike status? Moments before his death, Gil informed his executioner that the executioner's son was gravely ill. He told the soldier that if he were buried – not the custom with deserters – the man's son would recover.

After lopping off Gil's head, the executioner carried it back to the town of Goya where – of course – a judicial pardon awaited Gil. On finding that his son was indeed seriously ill, the soldier returned to the site and buried the body. His son recovered quickly, word spread and a legend was born.

'Gauchito' Gil's last resting place is now the site of numerous chapels and storehouses holding thousands of votive offerings – including T-shirts, bicycles, pistols, knives, license plates, photographs, cigarettes, hair clippings and entire racks of wedding gowns – brought by those who believe in the gaucho's miracles. January 8, the date of Gil's death, attracts the most pilgrims. If you are driving past, the story goes that you must sound your horn or suffer long delays on the road – or, more ominously, never arrive at all.

The lakes and *esteros* (estuary) are shallow, fed only by rainwater, and thick with vegetation. Water plants and other vegetation accumulate to form *embalsados* (dense floating islands), and this fertile habitat is home to a stunning array of life. Sinister black caimans bask in the sun while capybaras feed around them. Other mammals include the beautiful orange-colored marsh deer, howler monkeys (officially the world's noisiest animal), the rare maned wolf, coypu, otters and several species of bat.

There are some 350 species of bird present in the reserve, including colorful kingfishers, delicate hummingbirds, parrots, spoonbills, kites, vultures, several species of egret and heron, cormorants, ducks, cardinals and the enormous southern screamer, which would really light up Big Uncle Bob's eyes at a Christmas roast. *Ibera: Vida y Color* (AR\$40 to AR\$60), on sale at various places around town, is a useful wildlife guide with beautiful photos of most of the birds, plants and animals you may see.



1 Iguazú Falls (p185)

Seeing this jaw-dropping sight is one of the highlights of a visit to Argentina.

2 Esteros del Iberá (p163)

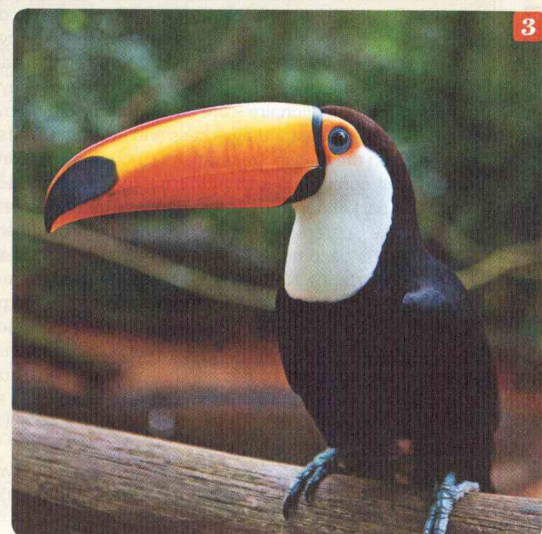
Winding wetlands that contain an abundant array of wildlife and aquatic plants.

3 Toucan

This colorful bird can be easily seen at Parque Nacional Iguazú.

4 San Ignacio Mini (p179)

The best preserved mission ruins in all of Argentina.



Activities & Tours

The best way to appreciate the area is by boat. The classic trip is a two- to 2½-hour excursion in a *lancha* (small passenger motorboat; AR\$80 to AR\$90), which takes you around the Laguna Iberá and its *embalsados*. You'll see myriad bird and animal life, elegant lilies, water hyacinths and other aquatic plants. The guide will punt you remarkably close to the creatures. You can also take a night trip; go prepared with plenty of insect repellent!

The short path opposite the visitors center gives you a sporting chance of seeing howler monkeys up close, and their other paths here introduce you to the different plants and habitats of the area. You can take guided night walks on one of the paths. Longer guided walks are also available, as are horseback rides (AR\$70), although these are more for the ride's sake than for wildlife spotting. Several of the lodges offer a *día del campo* – a day's excursion to a ranch that incorporates horseback riding, an *asado* (barbecue) and other gaucho pursuits.

The Laguna Iberá is only a small part of the 13,000-sq-km area of the Esteros. Some 80km north, at Galarza, is the Laguna Galarza and the larger Laguna de Luna, which also can be explored by boat.

Most of the lodges can organize these activities; if you are staying at one they are usually included in the price. If not, there are many other options. Organize boat trips at the camp site (from where most trips leave). There are several local, independent guides in town; the tourist office has a list. Note that few guides speak English; if you want an English-speaking guide, it's best to go through one of the lodges.

Sleeping

COLONIA PELLEGRINI

Colonia Pellegrini's accommodations are mushrooming, with more than 20 at last count. They are divided between *hospedajes*, usually simple rooms behind a family home, and *posadas* (inns) or *hosterías*, comfortable lodges that offer full-board rates and excursions. Multiday packages are usually the

best value here. All the following can book a transfer from Mercedes or Posadas for you.

Posada de La Laguna LODGE \$\$\$
(☎03773-499413; www.posadadelalaguna.com; Guazú Virá s/n; s/d with full board and activities AR\$970/1645; 🍷🍷🍷) Simple and elegant, in wide grounds by a lake, it has bright white rooms with great beds and paintings by the owner. The emphasis is on relaxation (ie no TV), and staff pull it off, with friendly service, guided trips and good meals.

Hostería Nandé Retá LODGE \$\$\$
(☎03773-499411; www.nandereta.com; s/d AR\$250/500, 3 days & 2 nights incl full board & excursions s/d AR\$1760/2660; 🍷🍷🍷🍷) This place has been around longer than any, and is still one of the most pleasing. Surrounded by pines and eucalypts, it's got a peaceful, hidden-away feel that is highly seductive. It's very family friendly, the rooms are colorful, service excellent and the pool is a decent size. Good value.

Posada Rancho Jabirú GUESTHOUSE \$
(☎03773-15-413750; www.posadaranchojabiru.com.ar; Yaguareté s/n; s/d AR\$80/160) The best of the options in this price category. Set in a carefully tended garden, it has spotless rooms sleeping up to five in a pretty adobe bungalow. It's run by the friendly folk of Yacarú Porá restaurant next door.

Camping Iberá CAMPGROUND \$
(☎03773-15-629656; www.ibera.gov.ar; Mbiguá s/n; per person 1st/subsequent days AR\$45/35, vehicle AR\$15) This municipal campground by the lake is a great place with grassy pitches, nearly all with their own *quincho* (thatched-roof building). This is where to go for boat trips; it's also worth checking out the view as the sun sets. Book ahead as it's not huge.

Aguapé Lodge LODGE \$\$\$
(☎03773-499412; www.iberaesteros.com.ar; Yacaré s/n; small/large r incl full board s AR\$628/758, d AR\$1040/1343; 🍷🍷) This luxurious colonial-style posada is in a beautiful setting above the lake. It has attractive, high-ceilinged rooms along a veranda looking over the lawn to the water, and a wide variety of excursions. Service is multilingual and professional.

Irupé Lodge LODGE \$\$\$
(☎0376-443-8312; www.ibera-argentina.com; Yacaré s/n; s/d standard AR\$300/455, superior AR\$760; 🍷🍷🍷) On the lake near the causeway, this rustic lodge makes you feel very welcome. While the rooms are satisfactory, artistic wooden furniture, a pool and views across

the water are the highlights. Superiors are a lot better, more attractive and sizeable with more privacy, air-con and private verandas.

Hospedaje San Cayetano GUESTHOUSE \$
(☎03773-15-400929; www.iberasancayetano.com.ar; cnr Guazú Virá & Aguapé; s/d AR\$120/160; 🍷🍷) This friendly choice with plunge pool, kitchen and *parrilla* offers a variety of rooms, from simple flop-downs with shared bathroom to twins, doubles and family rooms with good beds and showers. Rooms can be private or shared, and prices are negotiable. The boss runs good boat trips and transfers.

Posada Ypa Sapukai LODGE \$\$\$
(☎03773-15-514212; www.iberaturismo.com.ar; Mburucuyá s/n; s/d AR\$490/580; 🍷) Secluded and rustic, this lodge has grounds (with hammocks and chairs for lounging) that stretch down to the lake and small dark rooms. It wins points for the name, which means 'The Cry of the Lake'. Daily excursion included.

Hospedaje Los Amigos GUESTHOUSE \$
(☎03773-15-493753; hospedajelosamigos@gmail.com; cnr Guazú Virá & Aguapé; r per person AR\$50-60) An excellent budget choice, with a kindly owner, this offers spotless rooms with big beds and decent bathrooms for a pittance. You can also eat simply but well here.

Hospedaje Iberá GUESTHOUSE \$
(☎03773-15-627261; cnr Guazú Virá & Ysyppó; r per person AR\$60) Clean rooms with fan and hot water. Bathroom behind a shop.

La Antigua Posada GUESTHOUSE \$
(☎03773-15-401111; iberalantiguaposada@hotmail.com; s/d AR\$195/240; 🍷) Cool, high-ceilinged rooms along a veranda. It has a cafe and very helpful owners.

AROUND RESERVE PROVINCIAL ESTEROS DEL IBERÁ

Estancia Rincón del Socorro LODGE \$\$\$
(☎03782-497073; www.rincondelsocorro.com; s/d incl full board & excursions AR\$1560/2080; 🍷🍷🍷) Off the Mercedes road, 31km south of Pellegrini, this ranch, owned by ecocampaigner Doug Tompkins, is a place in which to come to terms with the big sky and abundant wildlife. It's substantial country comfort rather than luxury; the pretty rooms interconnect, making them great for family stays, while freestanding cabins sleep two. Around the complex, vast lawns blend into pastureland and contemplation. If this isn't remote enough, head over to **San Alonso**, its sister *estancia*, only reachable by plane.

ECOLOGICAL ISSUES IN THE IBERÁ

With increasingly unpredictable weather systems assailing Argentina's pasturelands, the wildlife-rich wetlands of the Esteros del Iberá are under threat from a variety of sources, including traditional agricultural practices such as illegal pumping and burning-off to provide cattle-grazing land; local rice-growing interests have agitated for a dam to be built in the area to guarantee water for their crops.

The ecosystem of the Esteros is delicate and environmentalists are understandably anxious that it not be harmed. To this end, US entrepreneur Doug Tompkins has bought large tracts of land around the reserve and proposes to donate them to the Corrientes government, if it guarantees to put them and the existing Iberá wildlife reserve under the control of the Argentine government as a national park.

But many locals – who have named one of the donkeys roaming Colonia Pellegrini's streets after the millionaire – are far from thrilled by Tompkins' purchases, which mean the loss of their longstanding access and irrigation rights and the eviction of people who have lived on the land for generations (though never owned it).

Above all, some suspect that this foreign interest has a more sinister purpose. Beneath this part of northern Argentina – and extending into Brazil, Uruguay and Paraguay – is the Guaraní Aquifer, an immense body of underground fresh water which, as drinking water becomes an increasingly valuable global resource, is taking on major political importance. Nationalistic Argentines (and there are plenty) feel that this aquifer may eventually help put the nation back in a significant position on the global stage and (understandably, given South America's deplorable history of outside exploitation) view Tompkins' involvement with deep suspicion. What seemed like a straightforward act of ecological philanthropy has now become a political hot potato, pitting landowners, agribusiness and local, regional and national politicians against each other. Meanwhile the capybaras and caimans go about their business, oblivious that their fate is being decided at board meetings.

Check out www.theconservationlandtrust.org and www.proyectoibera.org for Tompkins' position and www.salvemosalibera.org (in Spanish) for water issues.

Estancia San Lorenzo

LODGE \$\$\$

(☎03756-481292; www.estanciasanlorenzo.com; d per person incl full board & excursions AR\$1240; ☉Mar-Nov) This divine little four-room *estancia* in Galarza is run by its exceptionally friendly owners who cook, talk, guide you on horseback and buzz you around the nearby lagoons to spy on caimans and capybaras. The food, all of it homemade, is superb (and seemingly endless). It can be tough to get there without a 4WD, but they'll pick you up (AR\$500 return) from Gobernador Virasoro (80km away), which is easily reached by bus or car from Posadas.

Hotel Puerto Valle

LODGE \$\$\$

(☎03786-425700; www.hotelpuertovalle.com; RN 12, Km 1282; d incl full board AR\$1733; 🍷🍷) This luxurious option is on the bank of the Paraná near the northeastern tip of the Esteros. It boasts five impeccable rooms in spacious grounds that include a caiman farm. Meals are excellent.

Eating

All of the midrange and top-end accommodations options put meals on for their guests. If you ask nicely in advance, and they have space, most of them will let nonguests eat. There are other simple options in town.

Yacarú Porá

ARGENTINE \$

(cnr Caraguatá & Yaguareté; mains AR\$25-45) Run with charm and enthusiasm, this bungalow guarantees a warm welcome. The food is prepared to order and features generous portions of meat, chicken dishes, pasta, omelets and *milanesas* (breaded cutlets).

Don Marcos

ARGENTINE \$

(cnr Ruta 40 & Guazú Virá; mains AR\$20-40; ☉lunch) On the main road, this offers simple, tasty home cooking. Sometimes opens for dinner at busy times.

Information

The enthusiastic **municipal tourist office** (info.turismo@ibera.gov.ar; ☉8am-7pm) is at the entrance to the village, after crossing the causeway en route from Mercedes, and it's the best source of general information. The reserve's **visitors center** (☉7:30am-noon & 2-6pm), on the Mercedes side of the causeway, has an exhibition, audiovisual presentation and short paths.

Note that as yet there is no bank or ATM in Colonia Pellegrini, so take plenty of cash. Internet access is limited; there's unreliable public access at a house on the corner of Guazú Virá and Timbó (AR\$6 per hour).

Getting There & Away

The road from Mercedes to Colonia Pellegrini (120km) isn't as bad as everyone says it is, and is gradually getting better, with the first 80km slowly being sealed. Except after heavy rain it's easily drivable in a normal car.

Bus services (AR\$35, three to four hours) are basic and unreliable; check at the bus terminal information office. The most reliable departure is at 12:30pm Monday through Friday, and 9:30am Saturday, returning from Pellegrini at 5am.

A faster and more comfortable way to get there is by combi or 4WD. This costs AR\$100 per person if there are enough people, more if not. Arrange this through the information booth at the Mercedes bus terminal or contact **Hugo** (☎03773-1541-9092; cnr Guazú Virá & Timbó) in Colonia Pellegrini. If it hasn't been raining, you could also get a *remise* from Mercedes if there's a group of you.

The road from Posadas is much worse (take the turning between Gobernador Virasoro and Santo Tomé if you're in a normal car). Drivers charge AR\$800 to AR\$1000 for a charter to Posadas, or AR\$600 to Gobernador Virasoro, from where frequent buses head the 80km on to Posadas.

There's no gas station in Pellegrini; the closest are in Mercedes and at the main road junction near Santo Tomé. Fill up before you head in. A couple of places in Pellegrini can sell you petrol and diesel.

Be aware that car hire companies in Posadas may refuse you service if you mention that the Iberá is one of your destinations.

ALONG THE RÍO URUGUAY

The second of the two great rivers that converge above Buenos Aires to form the Río de la Plata, the Río Uruguay divides the country of the same name from Argentina, and also forms part of the border with Brazil. Bridges provide access to these neighbors, whose influences have blended with those of indigenous and immigrant groups in the area. The riverside towns on the Argentine side offer plenty and are popular summer destinations for *porteños* (people from Buenos Aires).

Concepción

☎03442 / POP 73,824

Set around a stately plaza, Concepción del Uruguay (its full name) is a typical riverside town, wondering what to do with itself now that trade on the Río Uruguay has died off. It makes a decent stopover on the way north, has a couple of excellent places to stay and boasts the Palacio San José outside town.

Sights

The principal sights in the town itself are around the noble main plaza, where the earthy-pink colored basilica, Palacio San José, holds the remains of Justo José de Urquiza.

Palacio San José

PALACE

(www.palaciosanjose.com.ar; RP 39, Km30; adult/child AR\$5/1; ☉8am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-6pm Sat & Sun) Topped by twin towers and surrounded by elegant gardens, Justo José de Urquiza's ostentatious pink palace is 33km west of Concepción via RP 39. Set around an arched patio, with a walled garden out the back, it was built partly to show up Urquiza's arch rival in Buenos Aires, Juan Manuel de Rosas, and partly to show the power and wealth of Entre Ríos province. Local *caudillo* (provincial strongman) Urquiza was largely responsible for Rosas' downfall in 1852 and the eventual adoption of Argentina's modern constitution.

Sometime allies such as Domingo Sarmiento and Bartolomé Mitre supped at Urquiza's 8.5m dining-room table and slept in the palatial bedrooms. The bedroom in which Urquiza was murdered by a mob sent by Ricardo López Jordán is a permanent shrine, created by Urquiza's wife.

If you don't mind walking the final 3km to the palace, you can get a Caseros-bound bus from Concepción and get the driver to drop you at the turnoff, but an easier option is to take a *remise* direct from Concepción. **Sarbimas** (☎427777) will take up to four people there and back, including a two-hour wait, for AR\$115. Another option is a tour - **Turismo Pioneros** (☎433914; www.turismopioneros.com.ar) will take two people for AR\$100, including guided visit. There's a mediocre restaurant at the palace and picturesque grounds for picnicking.

Sleeping**TOP CHOICE** **Antigua Posta del Torreón**

BOUTIQUE HOTEL \$\$

(☎432618; www.postadeltorreon.com.ar; Alfarero 799; s/d AR\$280/320; 🍷🍷🍷) This intimate and classy hotel a block west and four south of the plaza offers a real haven for a relaxing stay. It's an elegantly refurbished 19th-century mansion, with rooms surrounding a postcard-pretty courtyard complete with fountain and small swimming pool.

Antigua FONDA

HOTEL \$

(☎433734; www.antiguafonda.com.ar; España 172; s/d AR\$140/200; 🍷🍷) Likable owners have

created this from part of what was once an historic Concepción hotel (though you wouldn't know). Pleasing rooms in shades of cream surround a small grassy garden, with artistic touches and a relaxing vibe. No breakfast, but there's a kitchen you can use. It's a block west and three south of the plaza.

Residencial Centro

GUESTHOUSE \$

(☎427429; www.nuevoscenro.com.ar; Moreno 130; d AR\$140; 🍷🍷) The best budget deal in town has a variety of rooms around a courtyard. They vary slightly in price depending on size and if they have air-con; there's more light in the ones upstairs. A block down the street is a simpler place, **La Posada** (per person AR\$80), that's a better deal for solo travelers.

Eating**El Conventillo de Baco**

ARGENTINE \$\$

(☎433809; España 193; dishes AR\$35-55) Near the Antigua Posta del Torreón hotel, this handsome place has both indoor and outdoor dining in an attractive patio space and specializes in well-prepared river fish and seafood, with dishes like calamari stew and glazed pork as specialties. Good value.

Café de la Plaza

CAFE \$

(www.cafedelaplazabar.com.ar; cnr Urquiza & Galarza; light meals AR\$20-40; ☉8am-2pm & 4pm-late) On the northwest corner of the plaza, this offbeat place has a bit of everything, with a terrace, chessboard tiles, tasty coffee, wooden bench-booths, food and regular live music.

Information

Telecentro Uruguay (3 de Febrero 63; internet per hr AR\$3) Internet and phone calls just off the plaza.

Tourist office (☎425820; www.concepcion.turismo.gov.ar; 9 de Julio 844; ☉7am-8pm Mon-Fri, 7am-10pm Sat & Sun) Helpful, but not clearly marked, it's two blocks west of the plaza.

BUSES FROM CONCEPCIÓN

DESTINATION	COST (ARS)	DURATION (HR)
Buenos Aires	115	4½
Colón	9	¾
Concordia	26	3
Gualedguaychú	14	1¼
Paraná	40	5

i Getting There & Around

The **bus terminal** (☎422352; cnr Galarza & ChiloteGuy) is 10 blocks west of the plaza. Bus 1 (AR\$1.75) runs between them; a *remise* costs AR\$5 to AR\$8.

Colón

☎03447 / POP 26,375

The most appealing destination for riverside relaxation in Entre Ríos, Colón is a very popular summer getaway for Argentine holidaymakers. Its population almost doubles in January, but the pretty town takes it all in its stride. With numerous places to stay, a thriving handicrafts scene and worthwhile, out-of-the-ordinary restaurants, it's a great place to be. It's also a base for visiting the Parque Nacional El Palmar.

One of three main Entre Ríos border crossings, Colón is connected to the Uruguayan city of Paysandú by the Puente Internacional General Artigas. The center of the action is Plaza San Martín, a block back from the river, and the street 12 de Abril running up to it.

i Sights & Activities

Strolling around the riverbank and quiet leafy streets is the highlight here.

La Casona (www.artesanoslacasona.com.ar; 12 de Abril 106; ☎9am-noon & 5-8pm), on the corner of the plaza, is a cooperative selling a wide range of handmade goods. There are numerous *artesanía* shops selling everything from *mate* gourds to pickled coypu.

In February the city hosts the **Fiesta Nacional de la Artesanía**, a crafts fair held in Parque Quirós that features high-standard live folkloric entertainment.

WORTH A TRIP

GAULEGUAYCHÚ CARNAVAL

A mellow riverside town, Gualeguaychú (www.gualeguaychu.info) is quiet out of season but kicks off in summer, with the country's longest and flashiest Carnaval celebration. Make a stop here any weekend from mid-January to late February and you'll find things in full swing. The main venue is the Corsódromo, where admission is AR\$60 to AR\$70 most nights.

There's a string of decent budget hotels along Bolívar between Bartolomé Mitre and Monseñor Chalup, and three hostels in town.

The town is easily reached by bus from Buenos Aires (3½ hours), Paraná and other towns along the Río Uruguay.

Gualeguaychú is also a crossing point to Uruguay: the town of Fray Bentos lies just across the bridge.

There are various boat trips available to explore the river and the Islas Vírgenes. Expect to pay AR\$35 to AR\$50 for a one- to two-hour excursion. **Itaicora Aventura** (☎423360; www.itaicora.com; San Martín 97) speak English.

i Sleeping

There are numerous summer campgrounds, cabins, bungalows and apartments available for rental. The tourist office can supply you with a list.

TOP CHOICE Hosteria 'Restaurant del Puerto'

☎422698; www.hosteriadecolon.com.ar; Alejo Peyret 158; s/d AR\$175/220; ☎@☎☎☎ In what has a strong claim to be Colón's loveliest house (on its prettiest street), this has cracking, characterful rooms decorated faithfully in keeping with the 1880 building, with enormous windows, plenty of wood and noble rustic furniture. The family duplexes (AR\$315 to AR\$350) are a good deal, as are midweek discounts. There's a restaurant serving good dinners, and a heated pool and Jacuzzi out back.

HOTEL \$

Hotel Plaza

☎421043; www.hotel-plaza.com.ar; cnr 12 de Abril & Belgrano; d standard/superior AR\$420/625; ☎@☎☎ This Colón staple has been around for a while, but it certainly never looked like this before. A sleek refit has left it looking modern and glistening. The rooms aren't quite as posh; the superiors are the new ones, with quality bathrooms. But the combination of plaza-side location (some rooms in each category have balconies) and decent-sized heated pool out the back make it a winner.

HOTEL \$

Isla Formosa

APARTMENTS \$\$

☎421146; www.islaformosa.com.ar; 12 de Abril 442; d/1 AR\$240/320; ☎@☎☎ On the main street – head straight down Sourigues from the bus station to reach it – this complex offers large, comfortable apartments with decent kitchen that are a good deal for anybody and great for families. Prices are much lower off-season.

i Eating & Drinking

There are numerous places to eat. Hit Urquiza for traditional Argentine options.

TOP CHOICE La Cosquilla del Ángel

ARGENTINE \$\$

☎423711; cnr San Martín & Balcarce; mains AR\$45-80; ☎Wed-Mon Colón's best restaurant combines elegant decor, a big welcome and service with a whimsical and unpretentious approach, particularly in the curiously named dishes and the intriguing restaurant name, which translates as 'The Angel's Tickle.' Many dishes combine sweet and savory flavors; try the *mollejas* (or *mollejas*; sweetbreads). The pasta is recommended and the wine list is above average.

El Viejo Almacén

ARGENTINE \$\$

☎422216; cnr Urquiza & Paso; mains AR\$30-55) A block from the plaza and offering a quiet, brick-walled interior decorated with old-time photos, this has a wide-ranging menu including great homemade pasta, delicious *empanadas*, river fish, and *parrilla* options. Portions aren't as big as in some places.

El Sótano de los Quesos

CHEESE \$

(cnr Chacabuco & Av Costanera; mixed plates for 1/2 persons AR\$32/58; ☎4-9pm Tue-Fri, 11:30am-9:30pm Sat & Sun; ☎) Near the tourist office, this intriguing spot serves a wide variety of artisanal cheeses and other delicacies at pretty thatched tables on a lawn looking over the port. There's also locally made wine and beer on hand, and a cellar shop whose aromas will almost compel you to buy.

i Information

Tourist office (☎421996; www.colon.gov.ar; cnr Gouchón & Av Costanera; ☎7am-8pm Sun-Thu, 7am-9pm Fri & Sat) Occupies the former customs building, built by Urquiza. There is also an office in the bus terminal, open 8am to 1pm and 2pm to 8pm daily.

i Getting There & Around

Colón's **bus terminal** (☎421716; cnr Rocamora & 9 de Julio) is seven blocks inland (roughly west) of the river and eight blocks north of the

ENTERING URUGUAY

There are three main crossings linking Argentina with its eastern neighbor Uruguay. From south to north these are Gualeguaychú–Fray Bentos, Colón–Paysandú and Concordia–Salto. All three are open 24 hours. See p552, for Uruguayan entry requirements.

main shopping and entertainment street, 12 de Abril. A *remise* into the center costs AR\$5 to AR\$6.

Destinations include Buenos Aires (AR\$115, five hours), Gualeguaychú (AR\$20, two hours) via Concepción (AR\$9, 40 minutes), Concordia (AR\$18, 2½ hours) via Ubajay (AR\$9, 1½ hours) and Paysandú, Uruguay (AR\$16, 45 minutes).

For details about crossing into Uruguay, see the boxed text, above.

Parque Nacional El Palmar

☎03447

On the west bank of the Río Uruguay, midway between Colón and Concordia, the 8500-sq-km **Parque Nacional El Palmar** (☎493049; www.elpalmarpn.com.ar; RN 14, Km199; Argentine/foreigner AR\$20/40) preserves the last extensive stands of yatay palm on the Argentine littoral. In the 19th century the native yatay covered large parts of Entre Ríos, Uruguay and southern Brazil, but the intensification of agriculture, ranching and forestry throughout the region destroyed much of the palm savanna.

Reaching a maximum height of about 18m, with a trunk diameter of 40cm, the larger specimens clustered throughout the park accentuate a striking and soothing subtropical landscape that lends itself to photography. The grasslands and the gallery forests along the river and creeks shelter much wildlife.

Park admission (valid for 48 hours) is collected at the entrance on RN 14 from 7am to 7pm, but the gate is open 24 hours.

i Sights & Activities

All the park's main facilities are 12km down a good dirt road leading from the entrance. Here, the **visitors center** (☎8am-7pm) has displays on natural history. You can organize canoeing, cycling and horseback-riding trips around the park here. Decent dirt roads lead off the main access road to three viewpoints.

Arroyo Los Loros, a short distance north of the campground by gravel road, is a good place to observe wildlife. South of the visitors center is Arroyo El Palmar, a pleasant stream accessed at two viewpoints, **La Glorieta** and **El Palmar**. These have short marked trails, and the latter has a hide for bird watching. There are three other short trails near the visitors center, and another bird watching hide near the Río Uruguay. Guided walks are available by prior arrangement.

There is excellent access to the river for swimming and boating from the campground.

Sleeping & Eating

In Ubajay there are basic rooms in the bus terminal complex as well as other cheap lodgings.

Camping El Palmar CAMPGROUND \$
(☎423378; camp sites per person/tent AR\$20/15) This sociable campground across the parking lot from the visitors center is the only place to stay that's in the park. It has shady, level camp sites, hot showers and electricity. The shop here sells snacks and food, including slabs of beef for the barbecues; opposite, there's a restaurant.

La Aurora del Palmar LODGE, CAMPGROUND \$\$\$
(☎421549; www.auroradelpalmar.com.ar; RN 14, Km 202; camp sites AR\$20 plus AR\$20 per adult; s/d without shower AR\$110/200, d/q from AR\$250/310; 📶📶📶) Between Ubajay and the park entrance, this property, as well as being a cattle ranch and citrus farm, has a protected palm forest at least as spectacular as those in the national park itself. It's an original,

well-run place with shady camp sites, family duplex rooms in a pretty bungalow, and rustic wooden rooms in renovated railway carriages. There's a good swimming pool and a restaurant. Canoeing, horseback riding, and palm safaris (AR\$55) are available.

Getting There & Away

El Palmar is on RN 14, a major national highway, so there are frequent north-south bus services. Any bus running north towards Concordia will drop you at the park entrance, 12km from the visitors center. You could walk or hitchhike from here or else stay on the bus a further 6km to Ubajay, from where a *remise* will cost you AR\$50 to AR\$60 to the visitors center. Ask the callshop alongside the bus terminal to call you one.

There's also a school bus that heads into the park on weekdays at noon and in the afternoon from Ubajay that will take you for free if it has space.

Several agencies in Colón offer half-day trips to the park, which include a guided walk. **LHL** (☎422222; www.lhlturismo.com.ar; 12 de Abril 119) near the plaza is one: the trip costs AR\$60 to AR\$90 depending on numbers, plus the park entry fee.

Concordia

☎0345 / POP 170,033

This pleasant agricultural service town on the Río Uruguay won't keep you spellbound for weeks at a time, but makes a convenient stop for a night. It's a citrus town - you can smell the tang in the air at times - and has a fine central plaza, riverside beaches and fishing. It also offers a border crossing, via the Represa Salto Grande hydroelectric project, to the Uruguayan city of Salto.

Sights & Activities

FREE **Museo Regional de Concordia**

MUSEUM

(cnr Entre Ríos & Ramírez; ☎9am-1pm & 2-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-6pm Sat & Sun) This down-at-heel museum covers Italian immigration and also has some fine old furniture. The main interest is the fabulous building, which blends French neo-renaissance architecture with art nouveau touches. It's badly in need of restoration.

Museo Judío de Entre Ríos

MUSEUM

(www.museojudioer.org.ar; Entre Ríos 476; admission AR\$20; ☎8:30am-12:30pm) Three rooms detailing the arrival and struggles of the Jewish gauchos (see p174), their way of life and the Holocaust seen through the eyes of one who experienced it. Also temporary exhibitions.

FREE **Castillo San Carlos**

RUIN

In the riverside Parque Rivadavia, at the northeastern edge of town, this ruined castle was built in 1888 by a French industrialist who mysteriously abandoned the property years later. French writer Antoine de Saint-Exupéry briefly lived in the building; there's a monument to his novella *The Little Prince* nearby. There's no charge for wandering around the ruins, but watch the kids.

Sleeping

Hotel Salto Grande

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎421-0034; www.hotelsaltogrande.net; Urquiza 581; s/d AR\$278/350; 📶📶📶) Just south of the main plaza, this polished, modern hotel offers excellent service and fair prices. There are several grades of room; the higher ones have better views and a mini-bar, but aren't a great deal better than the standards.

Hotel Pellegrini

HOTEL \$

(☎422-7137; hotelpellegrini@gmail.com; Pellegrini 443; s/d AR\$100/190; 📶) By far the best budget choice, this friendly family-run spot offers spotless rooms with TV and bathroom three blocks south of the plaza. Book ahead, as it's popular.

Hotel Concordia

HOTEL \$

(☎421-6869; La Rioja 518; s/d AR\$120/220; 📶) This cheap and cheerful choice occupies a cavernous building. Rooms vary in light, size and mattress quality. Bathrooms, some accessed via in-room stairs, are decent.

Eating

El Reloj

PIZZA \$

(Pellegrini 580; pizza AR\$20-35) This spacious brick-walled pizzeria has good ambience and a staggering selection of options. A haven for the indecisive as staff don't grumble about doing half-and-halves. It also does *parrilla*.

Malaika

ARGENTINE \$\$\$

(☎422-4867; 1 de Mayo 59; mains AR\$46-58; ☎8am-2am; 📶📶) Trendy eating has arrived in Concordia in the form of this relaxed and handsome cafe-bar on the plaza. It serves a variety of tasty meals, with salads, pizza, pasta, snacks and more elaborate fare, including plenty of vegetarian options and daily specials. Decent wines, caring service and a romantic mood seal the deal. Also lunches for AR\$44.

BUSES FROM CONCORDIA

DESTINATION	COST (ARS)	DURATION (HR)
Buenos Aires	158	6½
Colón	18	2½
Concepción	22	3
Corrientes	197	7
Paraná	83	4½
Paso de los Libres	74	4
Posadas	185	8

Information

Tourist office (☎421-3905; www.concordia.gov.ar/turismo; cnr Pellegrini & Mitre; ☎8am-7pm) On the square. The information desk at the bus terminal also has tourist info.

Getting There & Away

There are flights to Buenos Aires with **LAER** (☎0810-777-5237; www.laersa.com.ar). The **bus terminal** (☎421-7235; cnr Justo & Hipólito Yrigoyen) is 13 blocks north of Plaza 25 de Mayo. Four daily buses (none on Sunday) go to Salto, Uruguay (AR\$20, 1¼ hours).

From the port beyond the east end of Carriego, launches cross the river to Salto (AR\$15, 15 minutes) four times between 8:30am and 6:30pm Monday to Saturday.

The Buenos Aires-Posadas train line runs through Concordia. For details about crossing into Uruguay, see p171.

Getting Around

Bus 2 (AR\$2) takes Yrigoyen south from the bus terminal to the center. On its northward run catch it on Pellegrini in front of Banco de la Nación. A taxi to the bus terminal from the center should cost about AR\$10.

Paso de los Libres

☎03772 / POP 48,642

The name (meaning 'Crossing of the Free') is the most romantic thing about this border town on the banks of the Río Uruguay. It faces the larger Brazilian city of Uruguaiana on the opposite bank, and is connected to it by a well-used bridge. There's little to detain the traveler, but the town has plenty of cross-border life, a picturesque central plaza and decent sleeping and eating options.

DON'T MISS

THERMAL SPAS ALONG THE URUGUAY

Most of the towns along the Río Uruguay - Guaaleguaychú, Colón and Concordia for starters - have tapped the region's abundant geothermal aquifers to create appealing thermal spa complexes: a major focus of domestic tourism in these parts. They are well-equipped places with several indoor and outdoor pools of various temperatures. Entry to most of them is around AR\$30 to AR\$40. Check out www.termasdeentrieros.gov.ar for a complete list.

Sleeping & Eating

Hotel Alejandro Primero HOTEL \$\$
(☎424100; www.alejandroprimero.com.ar; Coronel López 502; s/d AR\$275/440; 🍷🍴🚰) A surprisingly good hotel, this has a swish lobby and restaurant area and slightly less impressive but very spacious rooms. Ask for one with views over the river and Uruguiana in Brazil on the other side.

Hotel Las Vegas HOTEL \$
(☎423490; Sarmiento 554; s/d AR\$140/210; 🍷🚰) Despite the burgundy carpets and '70s feel, this is a newish place in the center of town. The rooms are dark but comfortable and have bathrooms with good showers. The rooms up the back have more light and space.

El Nuevo Mesón ARGENTINE \$\$
(Colón 587; mains AR\$30-50) Smartly turned out in black and white – the waiters seem to be camouflaged – this offers really well-prepared dishes. There's pizza, *parrilla* and more elaborate creations, but it's all fairly priced and very tasty indeed. Grab a table outside if the weather's fine.

Information

There's no tourist office, but there are maps of town all over the center. ATMs are on the plaza and along Avenida Colón.

Libres Cambio (Av Colón 901) Changes money.

Getting There & Away

The **bus terminal** (☎425600) is 1km from the center. There are several daily services to Buenos Aires (AR\$240, 10 hours) and Posadas (AR\$110, five hours), via towns in between. There are also services to Corrientes (AR\$90, six hours) via Mercedes (AR\$25, three hours). More buses bypass the town, but can drop you off on RN 14, where you can get a taxi the last 16km to downtown.

Buses to Uruguiana, Brazil (AR\$2), leave frequently from 7am onwards, stopping on Av San Martín at Av Colón and across from the bus terminal (by the castlelike building).

For information about visa requirements for crossing into Brazil, see p189. The frontier is open 24 hours. Travelers report that you can transit to Uruguay without requiring a Brazilian visa here.

Getting Around

The area between the bus terminal and downtown is a little dodgy at night. Minibuses (AR\$1.50) run from the corner below the bus terminal into town. A taxi to the town center is AR\$15.

POSADAS & THE JESUIT MISSIONS

The narrow northeastern province of Misiones juts out like an Argentine finger between Brazilian and Paraguayan territory and is named for the Jesuit missions (see the boxed text, p184) that were established in

the region and whose ruins are a major attraction. Today San Ignacio Mini is the best restored; it and other ruins (including those across the border in Paraguay; see p177) are easily accessed from the provincial capital, Posadas. Buses churn through Misiones en route to the Iguazú Falls in the north of the province, but a detour will take you to another stunning cascade – the Saltos del Moconá on the Río Uruguay (see the boxed text, p180).

The landscape here is an attraction. Approaching Misiones from the south you will see a change to gently rolling low hills, stands of bamboo, and papaya and manioc plantations. The highway passes tea and *mate* plantations growing from the region's trademark red soil – the province is the main producer of *mate*, Argentina's staple drink.

Posadas

☎0376 / POP 324,756

Capital of Misiones, and a base for visiting the ruins of the Jesuit missions after which the province is named, Posadas is a modern city that gazes across the wide Río Paraná to Encarnación in Paraguay. Brightly colored street signs vie for attention on the bustling, humid streets, and shady trees stand guard in the several parks and plazas. Posadas is a stopover for travelers on their way north to

Posadas



Paraguay or Iguazú, but has plenty of charm of its own, if little in the way of sights.

Sights

The Jesuit missions are the area's big attraction. In town, the mighty Paraná itself is the main sight of Posadas.

Palacio del Mate

GALLERY
(Rivadavia 1846; ☎8am-12:30pm, 4-8pm Mon-Fri, 5-8pm Sat) Better than Posada's couple of desultory museums, this art gallery has temporary exhibitions and some displays on the *mate*-growing process.

Fundación Artesanías Misioneras

GALLERY
(cnr Alvarez & Arrechea; ☎9am-12:30pm & 5-8pm Mon-Sat) Guaraní culture is strong in this part of Argentina, and you'll see Guaraní artists selling their wares throughout the center. Particularly fine pieces are displayed and sold here.

Tours

Many operators around town offer tours to the Iguazú Falls, the Jesuit missions and the Esteros del Iberá.

Guayrá

TOURS
(☎443-3415; www.guayra.com.ar; San Lorenzo 2208) Very helpful tour agency offering half-day tours to the Jesuit missions (AR\$315 to AR\$375), the Paraguayan missions, Saltos del Moconá and more.

Posadas

Sights

- 1 Fundación Artesanías Misioneras B1
- 2 Palacio del Mate B2

Sleeping

- 3 City Hotel B2
- 4 Hotel Julio César B2
- 5 Hotel Posadas Urbano A2
- 6 Le Petit Hotel B3
- 7 Posadeña Linda B2
- 8 Residencial Misiones B2
- 9 Vuela El Pez Hostel B1

Eating

- 10 El Rayo A2
- 11 La Querencia B2

Drinking

- 12 Café La Nouvelle Vitrage B2

THE GAUCHO JUDÍO

The gaucho is one of Argentina's archetypal images, but it's a little-known fact that many a gaucho was of Jewish origin. The first recorded instance of mass Jewish immigration to Argentina was in the late 19th century, when 800 Russian Jews arrived in Buenos Aires, fleeing persecution from Czar Alexander III.

The Jewish Colonization Association, funded by a wealthy German philanthropist, began to distribute 100-hectare parcels of land to immigrant families in the provinces of Entre Ríos, Santa Fe, Santiago del Estero, La Pampa and Buenos Aires.

The first major colony was in **Moisés Ville** in Santa Fe province, which became known at the time as Jerusalem Argentina. Today there are only about 300 Jewish residents left in town (15% of the population), but many Jewish traditions prevail: the tiny town boasts four synagogues, the bakery sells Sabbath bread, and kids in the street use Yiddish slang words like 'schlep' and 'schlock.'

These rural Jews readily assimilated into Argentine society, mixing their own traditions with those of their adopted country, so that it was not unusual to see a figure on horseback in baggy pants, canvas shoes and skullcap on his way to throw a lump of cow on the *asado* (barbecue). Many of their descendants have since left the land in search of education and opportunities in the cities. Argentina's Jews number about 200,000, making them Latin America's largest Jewish community.

To learn more about the *gauchos judíos*, visit the Museo Judío de Entre Ríos at Concordia.

Festivals & Events

Posadas celebrates **Carnaval** (in February or March, depending on the year) with great gusto.

Sleeping

Hotel Posadas Urbano HOTEL \$\$\$
(☎444-3800; www.hahoteles.com; Bolívar 2176; s/d/ste AR\$452/525/713; 🏠📶🚰) The new kid on the Posadas block has rapidly become top dog with its wide array of facilities and great central location. The bright, large carpeted chambers all have great bathrooms, balconies and big windows with views over town. Suites add space but little else. The atrium pool space, art exhibitions, gym and spa facilities, and appealing lounge area add points.

Posadefia Linda HOSTEL \$
(☎0376-15-452-3909; posadenalindahostel@hotmail.com; Bolívar 1439; dm AR\$55-65, d AR\$150; 🏠📶) Run with a caring attitude, this excellent narrow hostel a short walk from the square offers a genuine welcome, comfortable bunks and a patio with tiny plunge pool. It's colorful and relaxing; there should be air-con and a computer available by the time you read this.

La Aventura HOSTEL, CABINS \$
(☎446-5555; www.complejolaaventura.com; cnr Avs Urquiza & Zapiola; dm AR\$65, cabins from AR\$310; 🏠📶🚰) This is a sort of HI-affiliated holiday camp, 4km from the center (bus 3 or 13

from Ayacucho, or a AR\$20 taxi ride). Cabins sleep up to four; there are also dorm beds and hotel rooms. In the large, leafy grounds are a river beach, a good restaurant, a pool, tennis court, minigolf and more.

City Hotel HOTEL \$
(☎443-9401; www.misionescityhotel.com.ar; Colón 1754; s/d AR\$133/224; 🏠📶🚰) Bang on the plaza, the City has just about the biggest sign in a big-sign town. Rooms vary; some are rather uninspiring with lino floors, but others, right up on the 10th and 11th floors, are nicer, with plenty of air and picturesque views from what's just about the city's highest point. The hotel is cheaper during the low season.

Le Petit Hotel HOTEL \$\$
(☎443-6031; www.hotelpepetit.com.ar; Santiago del Estero 1630; s/d AR\$200/250; 🏠📶🚰) Peaceful and simple, this is run by a kindly, helpful couple and features dark, clean, adequate rooms with big bathrooms around a leafy patio. You can park easily in this quiet residential zone.

Residencial Misiones GUESTHOUSE \$
(☎443-0133; Av Azara 1960; s/d AR\$60/100) Offering seriously cheap rooms in a characterful central building, this is a budget option for those who aren't hygiene freaks. The mattresses are in reverse gear, but it gains points for the low prices and the staff's caring attitude. Rooms vary in quality, so have a look at a few.

WORTH A TRIP

YAPEYÚ

It would be untruthful to call this delightfully peaceful place a one-horse town: there are many horses, and the sound of their hooves thumping the reddish earth in the evening is one of the nicest things about it. Yapeyú is a great spot to relax; the sort of place where locals will greet you on the street.

An hour north of Paso de los Libres by bus, this was founded in 1626 as the southernmost of the Jesuit missions. It's also famous for being the birthplace of the great Argentine 'Liberator', José de San Martín.

You can examine the Jesuit ruins – the **museum** (admission free; ☎8am-noon & 3-6pm Tue-Sun) here has a comprehensive overview of all the missions – and admire the ornate building that now shelters the ruins of the house where San Martín was born in 1778.

Right on the plaza between these two major sights, **Hotel San Martín** (☎03772-493120; Sargento Cabral 712; s/d AR\$130/190; 🏠) is a simple, welcoming place set around an echoey inner courtyard. For something more upmarket, head to the modern riverside bungalows at **El Paraíso Yapeyú** (☎03772-493056; www.paraisoyapeyu.com.ar; cnr Paso de los Patos & San Martín; bungalow for 2/4 people AR\$185/305; 🏠📶), where you can also camp.

There are four to five daily buses (AR\$9, one hour) to Paso de los Libres, some going further, and daily services to Posadas in the other direction. More buses stop on the highway at the edge of the town.

VISITING THE PARAGUAYAN MISSIONS

From Posadas there's a tempting and very rewarding day trip to two of the Jesuit missions in Paraguay. The ruined but majestic churches at Trinidad and Jesús de Tavarangüe have been carefully restored and preserve some fabulous stonework.

From Posadas, cross by bus to Encarnación (see p178) and get off at the bus terminal. From here, there are buses (most marked Ciudad del Este) every half-hour or so to Trinidad (G5000, 50 to 60 minutes). Get the driver to let you off at the turnoff to the ruins; it's then a 700m walk.

The **Trinidad ruins** (☎7am-7pm, to 5:30pm Apr-Sep) are spectacular, with the red-brown stone of the church contrasting strongly with the flower-studded green grass and surrounding hillsides. Unlike at the Argentine missions, there is much decoration preserved here: the scalloped niches still hold timeworn sculptures, and the font and elaborate baroque pulpit are impressive. The doorways are capped with fine, carved decoration. You can climb to the top of one of the walls, but careful with the kids – there's no guardrail up there. An earlier church and bell tower have also been restored here. There's a hotel and restaurant by the ruins.

For **Jesús de Tavarangüe**, walk back to the main road and turn right. At the gas station 200m away is the turnoff to Jesús, 12km away. Shared taxis (G7000) wait here to fill, and buses (G5000) pass every two hours. You can get a taxi to take you to Jesús de Tavarangüe, wait for you and bring you back to the turnoff for about G20,000.

The restored **church** (☎7am-7pm, to 5:30pm in winter) at Jesús de Tavarangüe was never finished. The spectacular trefoil arches (a nod to Spain's Moorish past) and carved motifs of crossed swords and keys make it perhaps the most picturesque of all the Jesuit ruins. The treble-naved church, with green grass underfoot, is on a similarly monumental scale as Trinidad. You can climb the tower for views of the surrounding countryside.

Head back to the main road by bus or taxi; buses back to Encarnación stop by the gas station. Last stop is at or by the bus terminal; buses back to Posadas leave from the bus stop outside the bus terminal, opposite the school.

A joint ticket for the ruins at Trinidad, Jesús, and San Cosme (southwest of Encarnación) is G25,000; it's valid for three days.

Note: you may need a visa to enter Paraguay. Currently, Americans, Canadians, Australians and New Zealanders do; Israelis, Brits and other EU citizens don't. A single-entry visa costs US\$65 from the Paraguayan consulate in Posadas and can be ready in about an hour. You'll need passport photos, a copy of your passport, proof of an onward ticket and possibly proof of sufficient funds (a credit card may do). You can risk going through without getting your passport stamped, but the fine is US\$100 if you get caught.

Hotel Julio César

HOSTEL \$\$
(☎442-7930; www.juliocesarhotel.com.ar; Entre Ríos 195; s/d AR\$365/425; 🏠📶🚰) This four-star job in the city center has light, spacious, summery rooms with fridge and pleasing bathrooms. The slightly pricier superior rooms are identical but on higher floors.

Vuela El Pez Hostel

HOSTEL \$
(☎443-8706; www.vuelaelpez.com.ar; 25 de Mayo 1216; dm/d AR\$49/170, tw without bathroom AR\$130; 🏠📶🚰) Atop a bluff near the *costanera*, this unsigned building contains a very laid-back hostel indeed.

Eating

TOP CHOICE La Rueda

La Tradicional

PARRILLA \$\$
(☎442-5620; Arrechea & Costanera; mains AR\$40-60) Stylish and traditional in feel, with uniformed waiters and sturdy wooden seats, this two-level grill restaurant is in a prime riverside position: look for the wooden wheel outside. There is excellent service, quality meats and a nice line in salads and river fish put this a class above most *parrilla* places.

Itakua

FUSION \$\$

(Costanera s/n; mains AR\$40-70; ☎) The in-place in Posadas in recent times, this spacious and stylish bar-restaurant is in the heart of the riverside strip. Traditional Argentine ingredients are given a bit of zip with eclectic European influences: brie, basil pesto and sauerkraut are all seen accompanying local meats here. The quality is reliable, as is the buzzy atmosphere.

La Querencia

PARRILLA \$\$

(☎443-7117; Bolívar 322; mains AR\$33-75; ☎) On the plaza, this upmarket *parrilla* specializes in delicious *galeto* (marinated chicken pieces). Also memorable are the brochettes (giant spikes with various delicious meats impaled upon them). The salads are also unusually well prepared.

El Rayo

CAFETERIA \$

(Bolívar 2089; light meals AR\$17-33) No-frills and effective, this joint is thronged at lunchtime for its delicious *empanadas*, *lomitos* and good-value pizza. Service comes with a smile, too. Thumbs up.

**Drinking & Entertainment**

Most of the weekend action is down at the *costanera*, where a knot of eateries, bars and nightclubs go loud and late. Head north up Buenos Aires and its continuation for some nine blocks from the city center.

Café La Nouvelle Vitrage

CAFE

(Bolívar 1899; ☎) With a vaguely French feel, this amiable cafe on the plaza has a comfy interior and a terrace perfect for watching everyday life in Posadas go by.

Information

There are several ATMs around the plaza, and call centers and internet places nearby.

Cambios Mazza (Bolívar) Changes traveler's checks.

Hospital General R Madariaga (☎444-7775; Av López Torres 1177) About 1km south of downtown.

Tourist office (☎444-7539; www.turismo.misiones.gov.ar; Colón 1985; ☎8am-8pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon, 4-8pm Sat & Sun) Has well-informed staff. There's another office at the bus terminal, open the same hours.

Getting There & Away**Air**

Aerolíneas Argentinas (☎442-2036; Ayacucho 1724) flies five times weekly to Buenos Aires.

Bus

Buses to Encarnación, Paraguay (AR\$5), leave every 20 minutes from the corner of San Lorenzo and Entre Ríos. With border formalities, the trip can take more than an hour, but is usually quicker.

Everyone gets out to clear Argentine emigration. The bus may leave without you; hang onto your ticket to catch the next one. The same happens on the Paraguayan side. There's a handy tourist office right by Paraguayan immigration, and official moneychangers hanging around. Make sure you get small denominations: a 100,000 guaraní note is hell to change.

Posadas' **bus terminal** (☎442-5800; RN 12 & Av Santa Catalina) can be reached from downtown by buses 8, 15, 21 or 24 (AR\$1.75). It's around AR\$30 in a taxi.

Bus services to San Ignacio (AR\$14, one hour) depart roughly half-hourly.

Train

The Posadas-Buenos Aires **train service** (☎443-6076; www.trenesdellitoral.com.ar) is cheap but an exercise in patience. The battered old *Gran Capitán* runs to Buenos Aires' Federico Lacroze train station at 11pm on Wednesday and 3pm on Sunday, leaving from Buenos Aires at 10:50am on Tuesday and 10:05pm on Friday. It theoretically takes 30 hours, but usually takes many more. Tickets in tourist/1st class costs AR\$118/180. At time of research a railbus was running from Garupá station, 10km south of Posadas, to meet the train at Apóstoles.

Getting Around

Bus 28 (AR\$1.75) goes to the airport from San Lorenzo (between La Rioja and Entre Ríos). A *remise* costs about AR\$40. **Avis** (☎459-6660; www.avis.com.ar; Azará 1908) is a recommended car-rental agency.

BUSES FROM POSADAS

DESTINATION	COST (ARS)	DURATION (HR)
Buenos Aires	362	14
Corrientes	102	4
Paso de los Libres	110	6
Puerto Iguazú	102	5
Resistencia	106	5
Rosario	322	16
Santa Fe	295	14
Tucumán	408	17

Around Posadas**SANTA ANA & LORETO**

Atmospherically decaying in the humid forest, these two Jesuit missions are both off RN 12 between Posadas and San Ignacio, the site of another (better restored) mission.

At **Santa Ana** (☎8am-6pm), which was founded in 1633 but moved here in 1660, dense forest has been partially removed to reveal a settlement that had over 7000 Guaraní inhabitants at its peak. The enormous plaza, 140m square, attests to the importance of the settlement.

The muscular church's thick walls have been propped up with interior scaffolding; a few photogenic strangler figs grow atop them, lending a dramatic effect to what must have been a magnificent building, though none of its decorative embellishments remain. The church was designed by the Italian architect Brasanelli, who also worked on the San Ignacio church.

To the right side of the church is the cemetery, which was used by villagers into the later half of the 20th century but is now neglected. Crypts with doors agape reveal coffins that have fallen from their shelves and burst open; if this place doesn't give you the willies, you haven't watched enough horror movies.

Behind the church, a channel and reservoir remain from what was a sophisticated irrigation system.

Loreto (☎8am-6pm), founded in 1632, has even fewer visible remains than Santa Ana, and you may feel it's not worth the effort to visit via public transportation. The old adobe latrine and a chapel are partially restored, but the jungle is king here again and it's difficult to interpret the tumbled mossy stones among the trees. It's undeniably atmospheric, though. It was one of the more important missions; a printing press was built here – the first in the southern part of the continent.

Admission for both Loreto and Santa Ana is via a **joint ticket** (Argentines/other Latin Americans/other nationalities AR\$30/40/50) that includes San Ignacio Miní and Santa María la Mayor. Both Santa Ana and Loreto are staffed by knowledgeable students, who give recommended tours, included in the admission price. The missions have small museums and kiosks at their entrances.

Getting There & Away

Buses heading north from Posadas stop at the turnoffs on RN 12 for both sites. Santa Ana's is at Km 43, from where it's a 1km walk to the ruins.

Loreto's is at Km 48, with a 3km walk. It can be intensely hot, so take plenty of water. You may be able to hitch a lift on the school bus on your way back; ask at Loreto mission. You can get a *remise* from San Ignacio to take you to both, including waiting time, for about AR\$150 to AR\$200.

SANTA MARÍA LA MAYOR

Further afield, this is the fourth mission on the joint admission ticket for San Ignacio, Santa Ana and Loreto. A sizable plaza is the main feature, with the church very ruinous. The settlement was a large one, with printing press and prison; the chapel is a 20th-century addition. It's a relaxing place surrounded by jungle that's great for bird watching, with toucans and trogons easily spotted. The visitors center has a good bird-identification pamphlet.

The ruins are right on the RP 2 road between Concepción de la Sierra and San Javier, 110km southeast of Posadas. To get there, take a bus from Posadas to Concepción de la Sierra. There, change to a San Javier-bound service and ask the driver to let you off at the ruins, which are some 25km down the road. You can get a San Javier-bound bus direct from Posadas, but make sure it runs via the ruins – some go a different way.

San Ignacio

☎0376 / POP 6312

The best preserved of the Argentine missions, San Ignacio Miní is the central attraction of this small town north of Posadas. You could visit from Posadas or on your way to Iguazú, but a better idea is to stay the night. The hotels are comfortable, and you'll have a chance to check out the sound-and-light show at the ruins as well as Quiroga's house; both are worthwhile.

San Ignacio is 56km northeast of Posadas via RN 12. From the highway junction Av Sarmiento leads 1km to the center, where Rivadavia leads six blocks north to the ruins.

Sights**San Ignacio Miní**

RUINS

(www.misiones-jesuiticas.com.ar; entrance Calle Alberdi s/n; Argentines/Latin Americans/other nationalities AR\$30/40/50; ☎7am-7pm) These mission ruins are the most complete of those in Argentina and impressive for the quantity of carved ornamentation still visible and for the amount of restoration done. No roofs remain, but many of the living quarters and workshops have been re-erected.

First founded in 1610 in Brazil, but abandoned after repeated attacks by slavers, San Ignacio was established at its present site in 1696 and functioned until the Jesuits finally gave in to the order of expulsion in 1768. The ruins, rediscovered in 1897 and restored between 1940 and 1948, are a great example of 'Guaraní baroque.' At its peak, the settlement had a Guaraní population of nearly 4000.

The entrance is on the north side on Calle Alberdi, where the first stop is the

interpretation center. It's an impressive display with plenty of unbiased information (in Spanish and English) about the missions from both the Jesuit and Guaraní perspectives. You can listen to Guaraní music, including some religious pieces composed at the missions, and inspect a virtual model of San Ignacio as it would have been.

The ruins themselves feature interactive panels that provide multilingual information, or you can join an informative free

tour; guides speak English and some also speak French and German. You first pass between rows of Guaraní houses before arriving at the plaza, on one side of which is the enormous red sandstone church. Impressive in its dimensions, it is the focal point of the settlement. While the red-brown stone is very picturesque, the buildings were originally white. Before lime was widely available, it was obtained by burning snail shells.

By the church, the cloisters preserve some ornately carved balustrades and the original flooring of some of the rooms off it. Just before the exit is another museum containing some excellent carved paving stones.

In summer it's worth trying to avoid visiting between 10am and 1pm, as the site gets particularly busy with tour groups at these times.

There is a *Luz y Sonido* (sound-and-light show) at the ruins every night from mid-September to March, and sporadically at other times. It's included in the price of the ticket and the time varies slightly between 7pm and 8pm.

The admission ticket is valid for 15 days, and includes entry to the nearby ruins at Santa Ana and Loreto and also to Santa María la Mayor, a little further afield.

Casa de Horacio Quiroga HOUSE
(Av Quiroga s/n; admission AR\$10; ☺8am-6:45pm)
The Uruguayan novelist and poet Horacio Quiroga was a get-back-to-nature type who found his muse in the rough-and-ready Misiones backwoods lifestyle. His house at the southern end of town (a 20- to 30-minute walk) is a simple affair, which he built himself out of stone.

To reach it, you walk a trail through the sugarcane, where panels (in English, too) detail the events of a deeply tragic life so full of shotgun accidents and doses of cyanide it's almost funny.

Grand views of the Paraná (which you'll have to crane to see if the vegetation is high) inspired Quiroga to write his regionally based stories that transcend time and place without abandoning their setting. Some of his short fiction is available in English translation in *The Exiles and Other Stories*.

Next to the stone house is a replica of his initial wooden house, built for the 1996 biographical film *Historias de Amor, de Locura y de Muerte* (Stories of Love, Madness and Death).

Sleeping & Eating

Various simple eating options – serving burgers, pizzas and milanesas – crowd the streets around the ruins; most are open during the day only.

TOP CHOICE **Hotel La Toscana** HOTEL \$
(☎447-0777; www.hotellatoscana.com.ar; cnr H.Irigoyen & Uruguay; s/d AR\$110/170; 🏠🍷🍴) In a quiet location a couple of blocks back from the highway, this welcoming Italian-run place is a relaxing retreat indeed. Cool, spacious rooms surround a great pool, deck and garden area. It's a top spot to unwind for a few days.

Hotel San Ignacio HOTEL \$
(☎447-0047; www.hotelsanignacio.com.ar; cnr Sarmiento & San Martín; s/d AR\$100/160, 4-person cabana AR\$250; 🏠🍷🍴) Located bang in the town center, this is an excellent choice for its clean, quiet, comfortable rooms, great bathrooms, benevolent owners and an attached bar and internet cafe. The A-frame cabins out the back are great value for groups. The bar does simple tasty food. You may never find it easier to be the best pool player in town, but the table football is a different story.

Adventure Hostel HOSTEL \$
(☎447-0955; www.sihostel.com; Independencia 469; dm/d AR\$56/196; 🏠🍷🍴) Next to the plaza two blocks south of the church, this hostel has darkish and slightly institutional (whitewashed brick) but comfortable dorms and private rooms, and excellent facilities. There's everything from ping-pong and DVDs to seesaws in the spacious grounds, and HI discount.

Itároga ARGENTINE \$
(cnr Rivadavia & Lanusse; mains AR\$30-45) This sweet little place a block from the central plaza area has a cute terrace, artworks on the walls and friendly service. Pizzas, snacks and tender meat dishes are complemented by river fish and some pretty good mixed drinks.

Information

Tourist office (☺8am-8pm) Helpful. At the highway junction.

Getting There & Away

The bus terminal is on the main road near the arch that marks the entrance to town. Services between Posadas (AR\$14, one hour) and Puerto Iguazú (AR\$61 to AR\$80, four to five hours) are frequent.

WORTH A TRIP

THE OTHER FALLS

Iguazú's aren't the only spectacular falls in Misiones province: the remote and unusual **Salto del Moconá** also live long in the memory. A geological fault in the bed of the Río Uruguay divides the river lengthwise and water spills over the shelf between the two sections, creating a waterfall some 3km long and up to 15m high, depending on the water level.

The falls are at the eastern edge of Misiones province, roughly equidistant from Posadas and Puerto Iguazú. From Posadas, several daily buses leave for El Soberbio (four hours); from here it's 75km to the falls, mostly paved. From the end of the road, if the river is low, you can pick your way along to the falls, but you'll see them much better by taking a boat trip.

Lodges organize trips to the falls and the various parks and reserves that protect the zone, as does friendly **Yaboti Jungle** (☎03755-495266, 03755-15-652853; mocona4x4@yahoo.com.ar; Av Corrientes 481, El Soberbio), which charges AR\$130 for a four-hour trip to the falls (AR\$390 minimum); the speedboat trip, with Brazilian and Argentine jungle reserves on each side, is an attraction in itself. Operators in Posadas and Puerto Iguazú also arrange trips. The same operators also run trips to remote Guaraní *aldeas* (villages) for AR\$80.

Most important: the falls aren't always visible; if the river is high, then you're out of luck. Ring ahead to find out. December to March is normally the best time.

El Soberbio itself is an interesting place, a service center for a lush agricultural area growing tobacco, citronella and manioc. There's a ferry crossing to Brazil, and blond heads are everywhere, a legacy of German and Eastern European immigrants joining the native Guaraní population.

There are several places to stay, including **Hostal Del Centro** (☎03755-495133; www.elsoberbioportaldelmocona.com; cnr Rivadavia & San Martín; r per person AR\$80; 🏠), right in the center of town but built around a grassy courtyard; rooms are good for this price and there's a kitchen you can use.

Hilltop **Hostería Puesta del Sol** (☎03755-495161; www.h-puestadelsol.com.ar; Suipacha s/n; s/d AR\$135/250; 🏠🍷🍴) offers decent rooms in a relaxing complex with spectacular views and a huge (summertime) pool. Half-board rates are available, and there are bungalows for groups.

Several jungly lodges are closer to the falls. Accommodations in these places are generally in elegant rustic cabins with great views. Rates (except for Aldea Yaboty) include some or all meals.

Aldea Yaboty LODGE \$\$
(☎03755-15-553069; www.aldeayaboty.com; r/cabin AR\$280/400; 🏠)

Don Enrique Lodge LODGE \$\$\$
(☎011-4732-3502; www.donenriquelodge.com.ar; s/d AR\$800/1280)

Posada La Misión LODGE \$\$\$
(☎011-5654-8388; www.lodgelamision.com.ar; d AR\$540; 🏠🍷)

Tacuapí Lodge LODGE \$\$\$
(☎03743-422484; www.tacuapi.com.ar; s/d AR\$780/1256; 🏠)

The Iguazú Falls

There are few more impressive sights on the planet than this majestic array of cascades on the border of Argentina and Brazil. Set in luxurious tropical jungle, the falls are accessible, but provide a primal thrill that will never be forgotten.

Brazilian Side

1 Hit the Brazilian side first to appreciate the wide panorama from its short viewing path within a birdlife-rich national park. Cascade after cascade is revealed, picturesquely framed by tropical vegetation before you end up below the impressive Salto Floriano (p188).

Garganta del Diablo

2 The highlight of the falls is the 'Devil's Throat.' Stroll out over the placid Iguazú river before gazing in awe as it drops away beneath you in a display of primitive sound and fury that leaves you breathless (p186).

Argentine Side

3 Two spectacular walkways, one high, one low, get you in close to torrents of water of extraordinary power. Expect awesome photos, expect to get wet, and expect to be exhilarated (p186).

Boat Trips

4 Not wet enough yet? Then prepare to be absolutely drenched. Zippy motorboats take thrillseekers right in under one of the biggest waterfalls on the Argentine side. More sedate canoeing and rafting excursions are also available on the Brazilian side (p187 and p188).

Jungle Trails

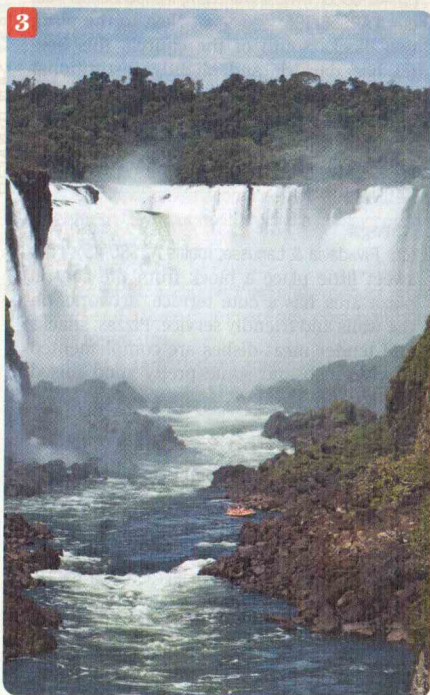
5 The waterfalls aren't the only thing on offer. National parks on both sides of the river offer various easy-to-medium trails through the jungle that give great wildlife-watching opportunities (p187 and p188).

Clockwise from top left

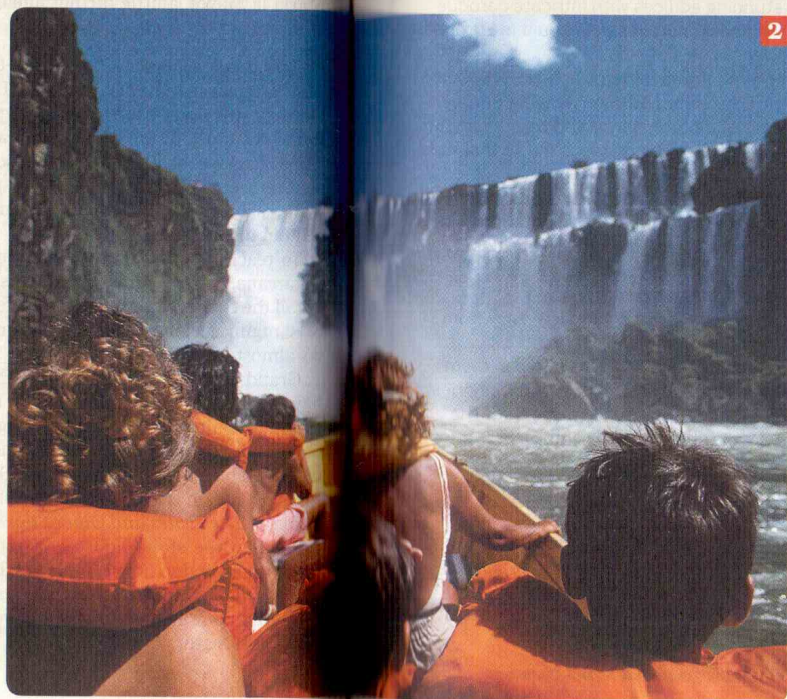
1. Foz do Iguazú (p194)
2. Garganta del Diablo (p187)
3. Iguazú Falls (p185)



WALTER BIBIKOW/ANAMANAGES/CONRIS ©



MARIE POLITZER/LOVELY PLANET IMAGES ©



MARK NEWMAN/LOVELY PLANET IMAGES ©

A TRIUMPH OF HUMANITY

For a century and a half from 1609, one of the world's great social experiments was carried out in the jungles of South America by the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits). Locating themselves in incredibly remote areas, priests set up *reducciones* (missions), where they established communities of Guaraní whom they evangelized and educated, while at the same time protecting them from slavery and the evil influences of colonial society. It was a utopian ideal that flourished and led Voltaire to describe it as 'a triumph of humanity which seems to expiate the cruelties of the first conquerors.'

For the Guaraní who were invited to begin a new life in the missions, there were many tangible benefits, including security, nourishment and prosperity. Mortality declined immediately and the mission populations grew rapidly. At their peak the 30 Jesuit *reducciones* that were spread across what's now Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay were populated by more than 100,000 Guaraní. Each mission had a minimum of Europeans: two priests was the norm, and the Guaraní governed themselves under the Jesuits' spiritual authority. The Jesuits made no attempt to force the Guaraní to speak Spanish and only sought to change those aspects of Guaraní culture – polygamy and occasional cannibalism – that clashed with Catholic teaching. Each Guaraní family was given a house and children were schooled.

The typical *reducción* consisted of a large central plaza, dominated by the church and *colegio*, which housed the priests and also contained art workshops and storerooms. The houses of the Guaraní occupied the rest of the settlement in neat rows; other buildings might include a hospital, a *cotiguazú* (big house) that housed widows and abandoned wives, and a *cabildo* (town council) where the Guaraní's chosen leader lived.

The settlements were self-sufficient; the Guaraní were taught agriculture and food was distributed equally. As time went on and the missions grew, the original wooden buildings were replaced by stone ones and the churches, designed by master architects with grandiose utopian dreams, were stunning edifices with intricate baroque stonework and sculpture comparable with the finest churches being built in Europe at the time.

Indeed, the missions' most enduring achievement was perhaps artistic. The Guaraní embraced the art and music they were introduced to and, interweaving European styles with their own, produced beautiful music, sculpture, dance and painting in the so-called Guaraní baroque style. It was perhaps the Jesuits' religious music that most attracted the Guaraní to Catholicism.

However, mission life necessarily had a martial side. Raiding parties of *bandeirantes* (armed bands) from Brazil regularly sought slaves for sugar plantations, and the Jesuits were resented by both Spanish and Portuguese colonial authorities. There were regular skirmishes and battles until a notable victory over an army of 3000 slaves at Mbororó in 1641 ushered in a period of comparative security.

The mission period came to an abrupt end. Various factors, including envy from the colonial authority and settlers, and a feeling that the Jesuits were more loyal to their own ideas than those of the Crown, prompted Carlos III of Spain to ban them from his dominions in 1767, following the lead of Portugal and France. With the priests gone, the communities were vulnerable and the Guaraní gradually dispersed. The decaying missions were then ruined in the wars of the early 19th century.

The 1986 film *The Mission* is about the last days of the Jesuit missions. Most intriguing is the casting of a Colombian tribe, the Waunana (who had had almost no contact with white people) as the Guaraní.

Almost nothing remains of several of Argentina's 15 missions, but those well worth visiting include San Ignacio Miní in San Ignacio, Loreto and Santa Ana; Yapeyú; and Santa María la Mayor. The fabulous Paraguayan missions at Jesús de Tavarangüe and Trinidad can be easily visited on a day trip from Posadas (see p177). There are others to visit not too far away in southern Brazil.

IGUAZÚ FALLS

One of the planet's most awe-inspiring sights, the Iguazú Falls are simply astounding. A visit is a jaw-dropping, visceral experience, and the power and noise of the cascades live forever in the memory. An added benefit is the setting: the falls lie split between Brazil and Argentina in a large expanse of national park, much of it rainforest teeming with unique flora and fauna.

The falls are easily reached from either side of the Argentine-Brazilian border, as well as from nearby Paraguay. Most visitors choose either to stay in Foz do Iguaçu, on the Brazilian side, or in Argentina's Puerto Iguazú. Both have a wide choice of accommodations.

History & Environment

Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca and his expedition in 1542 were the first Europeans to view the falls. According to Guaraní tradition the falls originated when an Indian warrior

named Caroba incurred the wrath of a forest god by escaping downriver in a canoe with a young girl, Naipur, with whom the god was infatuated. Enraged, the god caused the riverbed to collapse in front of the lovers, producing a line of precipitous falls over which Naipur fell and, at their base, turned into a rock. Caroba survived as a tree overlooking it.

Geologists have a more prosaic explanation. The Río Iguazú's course takes it over a basaltic plateau that ends abruptly just short of the confluence with the Paraná. Where the lava flow stopped, thousands of cubic meters of water per second now plunge down as much as 80m into sedimentary terrain below. Before reaching the falls, the river divides into many channels with hidden reefs, rocks and islands separating the many visually distinctive cascades that together form the famous *cataratas* (waterfalls). In total, the falls stretch around 2.7km.

Iguazú Falls



Seeing the Falls

The Brazilian and Argentine sides offer different views and experiences of the falls. Go to both (perhaps to the Brazilian first) and hope for sun. The difference between a clear and an overcast day at the falls is vast, only in part because of the rainbows and butterflies that emerge when the sun is shining. Ideally you should allow for a multiple-day stay to have a better shot at optimal conditions.

While the Argentine side – with its variety of trails and boat rides – offers many more opportunities to see individual falls close up, the Brazilian side yields the more panoramic views. You can easily make day trips to both sides of the falls, no matter which side of the border you choose to base yourself (but see p189 for border-crossing information).

National Parks

The Brazilian and Argentine sides of the falls are both designated national parks: Parque Nacional do Iguazu and Parque Nacional Iguazú, respectively. High temperatures, humidity and rainfall encourage a diverse habitat: the parks' rainforest contains more than 2000 identified plant species, countless insects, 400 species of birds and many mammals and reptiles.

Resembling the tropical Amazonian rainforest to the north, the forests of the falls region consist of multiple levels, the highest a closed 30m canopy. Beneath the canopy are several additional levels of trees, plus a dense ground-level growth of shrubs and herbaceous plants. One of the most interesting is the guapoy (strangler fig), an epiphyte that uses a large tree for support until it finally asphyxiates its host.

Mammals and other wildlife are present but not easily seen in the parks, because many are either nocturnal or avoid humans – which is not difficult in the dense undergrowth. This is the case, for instance, with large cats such as the puma and jaguar. The largest mammal is the tapir, which is a distant relative of the horse, but most common is the coati, a relative of the raccoon. It is not unusual to see iguanas, and watch out for snakes.

Tropical bird species add a dash of color, with toucans and various species of parrot easily seen. The best time to see birds is early morning along the forest trails.

Despite regular official denials, the heavy impact of so many visitors to the area has clearly driven much of the wildlife further into the parks, so the more you explore the

region away from the falls themselves, the more you'll see.

Dangers & Annoyances

The Río Iguazu's currents are strong and swift; tourists have been swept downriver and drowned in the area of Isla San Martín. Of course, don't get too close to the falls proper.

The heat and humidity are often intense around the falls and there's plenty of hungry insect life.

On both sides, you're almost certain to encounter coatis. Don't feed them; though these clownish omnivores seem tame, they become aggressive around food and will bite and scratch. Both parks have a medical point in case of coati attack.

You are likely to get soaked, or at least very damp, from the spray at the falls, so keep your documents and camera protected in plastic bags. You can buy plastic ponchos at the visitors centers on both sides.

Parque Nacional Iguazú

☎03757

On the Argentine side, this park (☎491469; www.iguazuargentina.com; adult/child 6-12yr AR\$100/70, Mercosur nationals AR\$70/40, Argentines AR\$40/20; ☎8am-6pm) has plenty to offer, and involves a fair amount of walking. The spread-out complex at the entrance has various amenities, including lockers, an ATM and a restaurant. There's also an exhibition, **Ybyrá-retá**, with a display on the park and Guaraní life essentially aimed at school groups. The complex ends at a **train station**, where a train runs every half-hour to the Cataratas train station, where the waterfall walks begin, and to the Garganta del Diablo. You may prefer to walk: it's only 650m along the **Sendero Verde** path to the Cataratas station, and a further 2.3km to the Garganta, and you may well see capuchin monkeys along the way.

There's enough here to detain you for a couple of days; admission (payment in pesos only) is reduced by 50% if you visit the park again the following day. You need to get your ticket stamped when leaving on the first day to get the discount.

Sights

Walking around is the best way to see the falls, with sets of paths offering different perspectives over the cascades. It really is worth getting here by 9am: the gangways are narrow and getting stuck in a conga line

of tour groups in searing heat and humidity takes the edge off the experience.

Two circuits, the **Paseo Superior** (650m) and **Paseo Inferior** (1400m), provide most of the viewing opportunities via a series of trails, bridges and *pasarelas* (catwalks). The Paseo Superior is entirely level and gives good views of the tops of several cascades and across to more. The Paseo Inferior descends to the river (no wheelchair access), passing delightfully close to more falls on the way. At the bottom of the path, a free launch makes the short crossing to **Isla San Martín**, an island with a trail of its own that gives the closest look at several falls, including **Salto San Martín**, a huge, furious cauldron of water. It's possible to picnic and swim on the lee side of the island, but don't venture too far off the beach. When the water is high, island access is shut off.

From Cataratas train station, train it or walk the 2300m to the Garganta del Diablo stop, where an 1100m walkway across the placid Río Iguazú leads to one of the planet's most spectacular sights, the **Garganta del Diablo** (Devil's Throat). The lookout platform is perched right over this amazingly powerful and concentrated torrent of water, a deafening cascade plunging to murky destination; the vapors soaking the viewer blur the base of the falls and rise in a smokelike plume that can often be seen several kilometers away. It's a place of majesty and awe, and should be left until the end of your visit. The last train to the Garganta leaves at 4pm, and we recommend taking it, as it'll be a far less crowded experience. If you walk, you'll see quite a lot of wildlife around this time of day, too.

Activities

Relatively few visitors venture beyond the immediate area of the falls to appreciate the park's forest scenery and wildlife, but it's well worth doing. On the falls trails you'll see large lizards, coatis and several species of birds, but you'll see much more on one of the few trails through the dense forest.

Sendero Macuco

WALKING

Along the road past the visitors center (you can also access it via a path from the Estación Central trailhead) is the entrance to this nature trail, which leads through dense forest to a nearly hidden waterfall, **Salto Arrechea**. The first 3km of the trail to the top of the waterfall is almost completely level, but there is a steep lateral drop to the base of the falls and beyond to the Río Iguazú,

about 650m in all. This part of the trail is muddy and slippery – watch your step and figure about 1¼ hours each way from the trailhead. You can swim at the waterfall. Early morning is best, with better opportunities to see wildlife, including toucans and bands of caí monkeys. Take insect repellent.

Explorador Expediciones

JUNGLE TOURS

(☎421632; www.rainforestvt.com.ar) Using knowledgeable guides, this is the best option for appreciating the national park's flora and fauna. It offers combined driving-walking excursions: the Safara a la Cascada takes you to the Arrechea waterfall (AR\$180, 90 minutes, 2pm daily); better is the Safari en la Selva (AR\$220, two hours, 10:30am and 4pm daily), a trip in an untouristed part of the park that includes explanations of Guaraní culture. It doesn't require you to buy the falls admission ticket; the afternoon departure includes a transfer back to Puerto Iguazú. Best to book a day or more in advance by phone or at their information booths at the falls.

Iguazú Jungle

BOAT TOURS

(☎421696; www.iguazuajungle.com) This set-up offers the following three excursions: a speedboat ride to the bottom of several of the waterfalls, including an exhilarating drenching under the San Martín torrent (AR\$125, 15 minutes); a quiet dinghy ride down the upper Iguazú (AR\$50, 30 minutes); and a one-hour trip combining a descent to the river in flatbed trucks along the Sendero Yacaratiá with a trip upriver through rapids to the falls (AR\$260, one hour). Discounts are offered for combining any of these tours and you may be able to negotiate cheaper prices at quiet times or late in the day. Book excursions at their booths at the falls; most hotels in Puerto Iguazú can also do this for you.

Full Moon Walks

WALKING TOURS

(☎491469; www.iguazuargentina.com; AR\$200) For five consecutive nights per month, these guided walks visit the Garganta del Diablo. There are three departures nightly. The first, at 8pm, offers the spectacle of the inflated rising moon; the last, at 9:30pm, sees the falls better illuminated. Don't expect to see wildlife. The price includes admission; a cocktail and dinner afterwards is an extra 70 pesos. Extra bus departures from Puerto Iguazú cater for moonwalkers. Book in advance by phone as numbers are limited. Most hotels in Puerto Iguazú can book this for you.

Sleeping & Eating

There's one hotel within the park. The numerous snack bars offer predictably overpriced snacks and drinks. The food is awful; bring a picnic, eat at one of the two buffet restaurants or lunch at the Sheraton.

Sheraton Iguazú

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎491800; www.sheraton.com/iguazu; standard r with forest/falls view AR\$1494/1810, superior r AR\$1650/1966; 🍷@🍷🍷) With a privileged position in the park itself and looking right up the river to the most spectacular section of the falls, the Sheraton backs it up with professional service and spacious rooms with balconies: the superiors are similar to the standards but a lot newer. The jungle-side view is pretty too. There's a good outdoor pool area, as well as a heated pool and spa indoors. Rooms are usually substantially cheaper if booking online. The restaurant has a limited selection (mains AR\$95 to AR\$125).

La Selva

BUFFET \$\$\$

(www.iguazuargentina.com; all-you-can-eat AR\$97; ☎11am-3:30pm) During your visit, this restaurant, which is close to the main entrance, will get talked up so much you'll fear the worst, but it's actually OK, with a buffet of hot and cold dishes, and all-you-can-eat *parrillada*. It's well overpriced but information kiosks dotted around the complex give out vouchers offering a substantial discount so head there first.

Fortin

BUFFET \$\$\$

(all-you-can-eat AR\$120; ☎10am-4pm) Well located near the falls walkways, this offers a buffet spread with fairly mediocre *parrilla* choices. It's close to the falls walkways but doesn't appear on park maps. Overpriced; try to bargain.

Getting There & Away

The park is 20km southeast of Puerto Iguazú. From Puerto Iguazú's bus terminal, buses leave half-hourly for the park (AR\$10, 40 minutes) between 7:20am and 7pm, with return trips between 7:20am and 8pm. The buses make flag stops at points along the highway. A taxi from town to the park entrance is AR\$100.

Parque Nacional Do Iguazú (Brazil)

On the Brazilian side, this **park** (☎3521-4400; www.cataratasdoiguacu.com.br; 12yr & older/under 12yr/Mercosur nationals/Brazilians R\$40.80/

6.70/32.55/24.30; 🎫tickets 9am-5pm) is entered via an enormous visitors center, which has a snack bar, ATMs and big lockers (R\$8), among other amenities. Parking here costs R\$12, but it's free at the Parque das Aves opposite.

Tickets can be purchased using Brazilian, Argentine, Paraguayan and US currency. After buying tickets, you pass through to an exhibition giving information (in Portuguese, English and Spanish) about the geology, history and biodiversity of the falls region. Behind the building, double-decker buses await to take you into the park proper. Keep your eyes peeled for animals. The last bus back from the falls is at 6:30pm.

Sights & Activities

Trilha do Poço Preto

GUIDED WALK

(☎3529-9627; www.macucoecoaventura.com.br; per person R\$135) The first stop is this 9km guided hike through the jungle on foot, by bike or on a trailer. The trail ends at Taquara Island, where you can kayak or take a boat cruise to Porto Canoas. You can also return via the Bananeiras Trail.

Macuco Safari

WALKING, BOAT TOUR

(☎3574-4244; www.macucoesafari.com.br; per person R\$140) The second stop is for this two-hour safari, which includes a 3km trailer ride through the jungle, a 600m walk to a small waterfall and then a boat ride up towards the falls. Don't confuse it with the Macuco trail on the Argentine side. Alight here, too, for the **Bananeiras Trail** (☎3529-9627; www.macucoecoaventura.com.br; per person R\$105), a 2km walk passing lagoons and observing aquatic wildlife, which ends at a jetty where you can take boat rides or silent 'floating' excursions in kayaks down to Porto Canoas. If you plan to do any of these, chat with one of the agents touting them around the park visitors center; they can get you a discount.

Waterfall Observation Trail

WALKING, ADVENTURE SPORTS

The third, and principal, stop is at the Hotel das Cataratas. This is where the main waterfall observation trail starts. At the beginning of the trail is also **Cânion Iguazú** (☎3529-6040; www.campodedesafios.com.br), an activity center offering rafting (R\$80), abseiling (R\$70), rock climbing (R\$50) and a canopy tour (R\$70).

From here you walk 1.5km down a paved trail with brilliant views of the falls on the Argentine side, the jungle and the river below.

Every twist of the path reveals a more splendid view until the trail ends right under the majestic Salto Floriano, which will give you a healthy sprinkling of water via the wind it generates. A catwalk leads out to a platform with majestic vistas, with the Garganta del Diablo close at hand, and a perspective down the river in the other direction. If the water's high, it's unforgettable; a rainbow is visible in the spray on clear afternoons.

An elevator heads up to a viewing platform at the top of the falls at Porto Canoas, the last stop of the double-decker buses. Porto Canoas has a gift shop, a couple of snack bars and an excellent buffet restaurant.

The park is open for evening visits once a month on the night of the full moon.

Helisul

SCENIC FLIGHTS

(☎3529-7474; www.helisul.com) By the visitors center, this set-up runs 10-minute chopper jaunts at 450m over the Brazilian side of the falls. The environmental impact is debatable (the Argentines suspended their service for this reason), but it's undeniably exhilarating. There are open panels in the windows for photography. The ride costs R\$195 per person; it's best done after you've visited the falls themselves. You can also book a 15-minute trip that takes in the Itaipú dam and triple frontier.

Parque das Aves

ZOO

(www.parquedasaves.com.br; admission R\$25; ☎8:30am-5:30pm) Near the park entrance is this large bird park. It has a huge assortment of our feathered friends, mostly Brazilian, with good information in English and Spanish. The highlight is the walk-through aviaries, where you can get up-

close and personal with toucans, macaws and hummingbirds.

Sleeping & Eating

Hotel das Cataratas

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎2102-7000; www.hoteldascataratas.com; standard r R\$938-1074; 🍷@🍷🍷) Right in the park near the falls, this excellent pinkish hotel has had a major facelift and is looking all the better for it. It appeals enormously for its location, but only a handful of rooms have falls views, and they are only partial. It's decorated throughout in understated, elegant Portuguese colonial style, with attractive tiles in the bathrooms and dark wood furnishings in the bedrooms. Public areas have cozy appeal, and there's a fine pool area surrounded by the calls of nesting birds. Service is excellent. Don't miss climbing the belvedere for the view of the falls.

Porto Canoas

BUFFET \$

(buffet R\$43; ☎noon-4pm) After the falls, you (and your camera trigger finger) deserve a break. This spot has a long pleasant terrace overlooking the river just before it descends into maelstrom – a great spot for a beer – and an OK buffet lunch with plenty of salads and hot dishes.

Getting There & Around

'Parque Nacional' buses run from Foz do Iguazú's urban bus terminal (you pay the fare entering the terminal) to the park entrance (R\$2.65, 45 minutes) every 22 minutes between 6am and 7pm, and then every hour until midnight, making stops along Av Juscelino Kubitschek and Av das Cataratas.

A taxi from Foz to the park entrance costs around R\$40.

ENTERING BRAZIL

At time of writing, many nationalities required visas to enter Brazil. These included the USA, Australia, Canada and Japan. EU citizens did not. Download the application form at <https://scedv.serpro.gov.br> and take it to your local Brazilian consulate before you leave home. You can also use the one in **Puerto Iguazú** (Córdoba 264; ☎8am-noon Mon-Fri), which is likely cheaper (Australia/USA AR\$161/644) than in your home country. You'll need a return ticket leaving Brazil, a photo and possibly a bank statement. If you get there early, it can usually be ready by the next working day.

That said, it is often – *but not always* – possible to take a day-trip by bus to the Brazilian falls without a visa. Argentine officials will stamp you out; stay on the bus when it passes Brazilian immigration and don't blame us if you're out of luck that day and get sent back.

Argentina doesn't charge an entry tax at land borders, so you won't be hit for pesos on your return to the country.

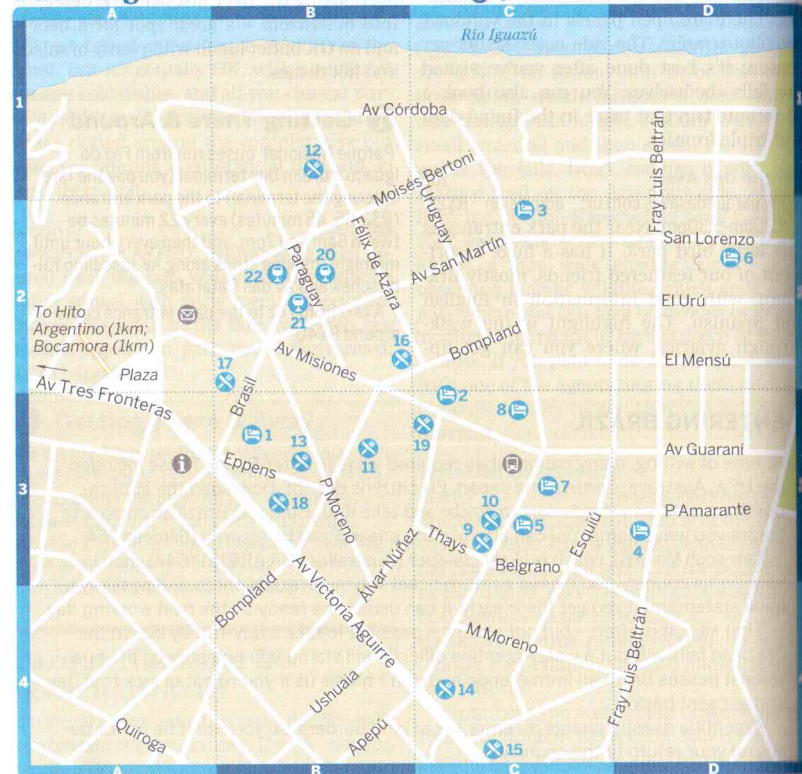
To access the Brazilian park from Puerto Iguazú, take the bus to Foz do Iguaçu but get off a couple of stops after crossing the international bridge (the driver will announce it). Here, cross the road, and wait for the Parque Nacional bus at the bus stop opposite. Repeat the process at the same stop on the way back. See p189 for information about entering Brazil.

Puerto Iguazú

☎03757 / POP 82,227

Little Puerto Iguazú sits at the confluence of the Ríos Paraná and Iguazú and looks across to Brazil and Paraguay. It doesn't really feel like Argentina any more. There's no center and little feeling of community – everyone is here to see the falls or to make a buck out of them. Still, it's quiet, safe and has good transportation connections, and there are also many excellent places to stay and eat.

Puerto Iguazú



Sights

There's little to see in the town itself, but 1km west of the town center along Av Tres Fronteras is the **Hito Argentino**, a small obelisk at the impressive confluence of the Ríos Paraná and Iguazú. From here you can see Brazil and Paraguay, with similar markers on their sides. A fairly desultory *artesanía* market is also here.

Güirá Oga

(www.guiraoaga.com.ar; RN 12, Km 5; admission AR\$40; ☎9am-6pm, last entry 4:30pm) Five kilometers out of town on the way to the national park, this is an animal hospital and center for rehabilitation of injured wildlife. It also carries out valuable research into the Iguazú forest environment and has a breeding program for endangered species. You get walked around the park by one of the biologists and get to meet the creatures. The visit takes about 80 minutes.

La Casa Ecológica de Botellas HOUSE (RN 12, Km 5; <http://lacasadebotellas.googlepages.com>; admission AR\$20; ☎8:30am-7pm) About 200m down a side road just before Güirá Oga, this fascinating place is well worth a visit. The owners have taken used packaging materials – plastic bottles, juice cartons and the like – to build not only an impressive house, but furnishings and a bunch of original handicrafts that make unusual gifts. The guided visit will talk you through their techniques.

Tours

Numerous local operators offer day tours to the Brazilian side of the falls (AR\$100 to AR\$250 depending on what's included), some taking in the Itaipú dam as well. Many have offices at the bus terminal.

Sleeping

There are numerous sleeping options for all budgets, including a string of resort-type hotels between town and the national park. In the streets around the bus station are many hostels – competition means you can find a bed for around AR\$35 at some of them. See also the Sheraton at the falls themselves.

Puerto Iguazú

Sleeping

- | | |
|----------------------------|----|
| 1 Che Lagarto | B3 |
| 2 Hostel Irupé | C3 |
| 3 Hotel La Sorgente | C2 |
| 4 Hotel Lilian | D3 |
| 5 Hotel Saint George | C3 |
| 6 Jasy | D2 |
| 7 Marco Polo Inn | C3 |
| 8 Residencial Lola | C3 |

Eating

- | | |
|------------------------------------|----|
| 9 Aqua | C3 |
| 10 Color | C3 |
| 11 El Quincho de Tío Querido | B3 |
| 12 Feria | B1 |
| 13 La Misionera | B3 |
| 14 La Rueda | C4 |
| 15 La Vitrina | C4 |
| 16 Lemongrass | B2 |
| 17 María Preta | B2 |
| 18 Plaza Pueblo | B3 |
| 19 Terra | C3 |

Drinking

- | | |
|---------------------------|----|
| 20 Cuba Libre | B2 |
| 21 Jackie Brown Bar | B2 |
| 22 La Tribu | B2 |

La Cantera Iguazú LODGE \$\$\$ (☎427220; www.iguazu lodge lacantera.com; Selva Iryapú s/n; d lower/upper AR\$684/862; ☎☎☎) Nestled in deep forest 1.5km off the falls road, this enchanting, intimate lodge has appealing rooms with balcony in wooden buildings that in some cases still have trees growing through them. The upper-level rooms are the same size but offer better jungle views and have a hammock to appreciate them from. Activities such as biking, guided walks and visits to the nearby Guaraní hamlets are included.

Jasy

(Los Troncos; ☎424337; www.jasy.com.ar; San Lorenzo 154; d AR\$440; ☎☎☎) Original and peaceful, these 10 two-level apartments climb a hill like a forest staircase and are all equipped with a balcony gazing over plentiful greenery. Artful use of wood is the signature; you'll fall in love with the bar and deck area. Prepare to stay longer than planned.

Loi Suites

(☎498300; www.loisuites.com.ar; Selva Iryapú s/n; r AR\$1390-1628; ☎☎☎) In the jungle yet just a few kilometers from town, this complex has several buildings connected by walkways and is so sizeable it feels more resort than lodge. It's decorated in relaxed country style and features a huge pool area surrounded by trees as its highlight. Rooms are spacious and comfortable; you might as well upgrade to one with a balcony for the bird-watching opportunities. Charging extra for spa use and wi-fi in the rooms seems a bit mean at these rates.

Boutique Hotel de la Fonte

(☎420625; www.bhfboutiquehotel.com; cnr Corrientes & 1 de Mayo; r AR\$693-866; ☎☎☎) This unusual place features characterful individual rooms and suites around a tree-filled courtyard garden romantically lit at night. It's enthusiastically run by a couple who'll make you feel most welcome and part of the family. Numerous small decorative touches make this more than the sum of its parts. There's a classy Italian-influenced restaurant, and a saltwater pool and hot tub among the palms.

Hotel La Sorgente

(☎424252; www.lasorgentehotel.com; Av Córdoba 454; s/d AR\$385/480; ☎☎☎) Book ahead for a real treat at this stylish but homey posada. Set around a verdant garden, life couldn't be easier here – if you can't face the long walk around the pool, take the bridge across it. Twin rooms have queen-sized beds; cozy upstairs

doubles overlook the pool and banana plants. Breakfast, served in the authentic Italian restaurant, gets the seal of approval, too.

Iguazú Grand

HOTEL \$\$\$
(☎)498050; www.casinoiguazu.com; RN 12, Km 1640; r from AR\$1316; (☎)(☎)(☎)(☎) Don't let the tacky ads for the attached casino put you off this classy place, just short of the bridge across to Brazil. It's comfortably the most up-market hotel on either side of the falls, with excellent service, pretty grounds, a great pool area and the town's best restaurant. Facilities are top-notch, it's had a recent facelift and children are made very welcome.

Residencial Lola

GUESTHOUSE \$
(☎)423954; residenciallola@hotmail.com; Av Córdoba 255; s/d AR\$80/120; (☎)(☎) Plenty of price gouging goes on in Puerto Iguazú, but it stops at Lola's front door. This cheap, cheerily run spot is very close to the bus terminal and features compact, clean rooms with bathroom for a pittance.

Hostel Inn

HOTEL \$
(☎)421823; www.hostel-inn.com; RN 12, Km5; dm/r AR\$70/280; (☎)(☎)(☎) This is more resort than hostel, and you get a lot for your pesos, as the spotless place is set in expansive grounds and has a big pool and all the backpacker-friendly facilities you can imagine. The dorms are commodious and air-conditioned; the ones in separate buildings in the garden tend to be a little quieter. Most readers love it to bits, though some complain about CHS (Cool Hostel Syndrome): you'll know whether it's for you or not. It's 5km into town, but the falls buses (AR\$2 to the town center) will stop right outside. HI discount applies.

Hotel Lilian

HOTEL \$
(☎)420968; hotellilian@yahoo.com.ar; Fray Luis Beltrán 183; s/d AR\$170/210; (☎)(☎)(☎) Run by a hospitable family, this friendly place offers plenty of value, with bright and cheerful rooms around a patio. The superior rooms only cost around AR\$25 more but have a balcony and heaps of natural light. All the bathrooms are spacious and spotless.

Marco Polo Inn

HOTEL \$
(☎)425559; www.marcopoloinniguazu.com; Av Córdoba 158; dm/d AR\$65/250; (☎)(☎)(☎)(☎) Built motel-style, this friendly hostel is opposite the bus terminal. The dorms are darkish but come with lockers and bathroom, and there's a host of other facilities. It's popular, so book. Substantial HI discount.

Hotel Saint George

HOTEL \$\$\$
(☎)420633; www.hotelsaintgeorge.com; Av Córdoba 148; s/d standard AR\$531/589, s/d superior AR\$606/664; (☎)(☎)(☎)(☎) The Saint George has been around for years and is reliable for comfort, service and organization. It's right across from the bus terminal and offers excellent facilities, including a garden and spa complex. Superior rooms are significantly larger, with two big double beds. Ninety pesos more gets you a buffet dinner.

Che Lagarto

HOTEL \$
(☎)422206; www.chelagarto.com; Av Brasil 24; dm AR\$40-80, d AR\$310; (☎)(☎)(☎)(☎) The Iguazú version of this popular hostel chain appeals mostly for its excellent public spaces – pool, big deck, plenty of lounging room – and atmosphere. The private rooms are quiet and usually cheaper than we list here; dorms are simple, with bathroom and no lockers.

Hostel Irupé

GUESTHOUSE, HOTEL \$
(☎)420711; irupeiguazu@yahoo.com.ar; Av Misiones 80; dm/s/d AR\$35/80/110; (☎)(☎) Good value for private rooms. Tight but cheap ensuite dorms with beds not bunks. Go for rooms at the back, which have more light.

Eating

Restaurants in Puerto Iguazú are pricey but generally of good quality, and open early for dinner to cater for tourists. There are frequently problems with paying with plastic, so ask beforehand or carry cash.

TOP CHOICE Bocamora

ARGENTINE \$\$\$
(☎)420550; www.bocamora.com; Av Costanera s/n; mains AR\$60-110; (☎) A superbly romantic location overlooking three nations is reason enough to come to this place just down the hill from the Argentine border marker. It specializes in grilled meats and well-prepared plates of river fish; you're paying a premium for the view here, but it's a great view. Arrive early to bag an outdoor table.

La Rueda

ARGENTINE \$\$\$
(☎)422531; www.larueda1975.com; Av Córdoba 28; mains AR\$58-75) A mainstay of upmarket eating in Puerto Iguazú, this culinary heavyweight still packs a punch. The salads are imaginative and delicious, as are the river fish (dorado, pacú and surubí) creations. The homemade pasta is cheaper but doesn't disappoint. Service is good but slow.

Aqua

ARGENTINE \$\$\$
(☎)422064; www.aqvarestaurant.com; cnr Av Córdoba & Thays; mains AR\$55-80; (☎) Solicitous service and plenty of flavor keep this split-level corner spot filled with the buzz of contented diners. The quality of the meat is excellent, and this is also a recommended spot to get to know some of the region's river fish.

Maria Preta

ARGENTINE \$\$
(☎)420441; Brasil 39; mains AR\$48-68; (☎) The indoor-outdoor eating area and evening guitarist make this a popular dinner choice, whether it's for steaks that are actually cooked the way you want them, for a wide range of typical Argentine-Spanish dishes, or for something a little snappier: caiman fillet.

Peria

MARKET \$
(nr Brasil & Félix de Azara) A really nice place to eat is this market in the north of town. It's full of stalls selling Argentine wines, sausages, olives and cheese to visiting Brazilians, and several of them put out mixed deli platters, other simple regional dishes and cold beer for very few pesos. Readers have recommended Ramona's *barraca* (hut), but there are plenty of good ones to choose from.

Color

PARRILLA, PIZZA \$\$
(☎)420206; www.parrillapizzacolor.com; Av Córdoba 135; mains AR\$35-78) This remodeled pizza 'n' *parrilla* packs them into its tightly spaced tables, so don't discuss state secrets. But the prices are fair for this strip, and the meat comes out redolent of wood smoke; try the *picaña*, a tender rump cut.

El Quincho de Tío Querido

PARRILLA \$\$\$
(☎)420151; www.eltioquerido.com; Bompland 110; mains AR\$45-80; (☎)dinner; (☎) Lively with the buzz of both tourists and locals, this popular *parrilla* has the usual grill favorites as well as giant 'baby beef' steaks and a range of interesting specials. It opens to cater for early-dining gringos. The wine list is pricey.

Terra

ASIAN \$\$
(Av Misiones 125; stir-fries AR\$40-60; ☎)Mon-Sat; (☎) Chalked signatures of myriad satisfied customers mark the walls of this chilled bar-restaurant that specializes in well-prepared wok dishes, with pasta and salads as other options. The streetside terrace fills fast.

Plaza Pueblo

FAST FOOD \$
(Av Victoria Aguirre s/n; light meals AR\$20-40; ☎)10am-10pm) This courtyard terrace is bang in the heart of town but set back from the road, so feels peaceful. It serves beer, pizza

and excellent burgers and *lomitos*, all with a smile. Fridays to Sundays there's worthwhile live music from 8:30pm.

Lemongrass

CAFE \$
(Bompland 231; snacks AR\$5-15; ☎)7:30am-midnight) There's something very likable about this artistic little cafe with orchids on the tables. Good fresh juices, decent coffee, delicious sweet temptations and tasty savory tarts are the way to go. We're not sure that, nice as they are, scones and jam constitute an 'English Breakfast' though...

La Vitrina

PARRILLA \$
(Aguirre 773; mains AR\$30-55) This homey barn of a place is the place to come for great *asado de tira* (ribs) among other *parrilla* delicacies. It's less touristy than some and has enticing outdoor seating. There's live music at weekends.

La Misionera

BAKERY \$
(P Moreno 207; empanadas AR\$4; ☎)10am-midnight) Excellent *empanadas* with a variety of fillings, and decent pizza from this well-regarded central bakery.



Drinking & Entertainment

Thanks to ever-increasing tourism and Brazilians from Foz looking for a cheap night out on the weakened peso, Puerto Iguazú's nightlife is lively. The action centers on Av Brasil, where at La Tribu the drinks are expensive but the terrace appealing. Opposite, Jackie Brown Bar pulls in the weekend punters, while the unobtrusive Cuba Libre around the corner gets the cross-border Brazilian crowd living it up on the dance floor.

Information

Argecam (Av Victoria Aguirre 1164) Changes money.

Banco de la Nación (Av Victoria Aguirre s/n) ATM.

Hospital (☎)420288; cnr Av Victoria Aguirre & Ushuaia)

Macro (cnr Av Misiones & Bompland) ATMs.

Tourist office (☎)420800; www.iguazuargentina.com; Av Victoria Aguirre 396; ☎)7am-9pm) There's another office at the airport.

Getting There & Away

Aerolíneas Argentinas (☎)420168; Av Victoria Aguirre 316) flies from Iguazú six times daily to Buenos Aires, once to Salta and once to Rio de Janeiro. **LAN** (☎)0810-999-9526) flies the BA route three times daily and somewhat more reliably.

BUSES FROM PUERTO IGUAZÚ

DESTINATION	COST (ARS)	DURATION (HR)
Buenos Aires	369-415	19
Córdoba	480	22
Corrientes	198	9
Mendoza	665-800	35
Posadas	102	5
Resistencia	205	10
San Ignacio	60-80	4

The **bus terminal** (☎442-3006; cnr Avs Córdoba & Misiones) has departures for all over the country.

There are international services, as well as Brazilian domestic services, across the border in Foz do Iguazu (p197). Some buses to Brazilian destinations such as Curitiba or São Paulo leave from the Puerto Iguazú bus terminal, too.

i Getting Around

Four Tourist Travel (☎422681; M Moreno 58) runs an airport shuttle for AR\$25 per person that meets incoming flights; from town, it needs to be booked in advance. A *remise* costs AR\$100. The airport is 25km from town.

Frequent buses cross to Foz do Iguazu, Brazil (AR\$8/R\$4, 35 minutes), and to Ciudad del Este, Paraguay (AR\$10, one hour), from 7am to 7pm from the local side of the bus terminal. All will stop near the roundabout at the edge of town.

A taxi to Foz do Iguazu costs around AR\$100; to the Brazilian falls it's AR\$120.

For information on entering Brazil, see p189.

Foz do Iguazu (Brazil)

☎045 / POP 308,900

Hilly Foz is the main base for the Brazilian side of the falls, and also gives you a good chance to get a feel for a Brazilian town. It's much bigger and more cosmopolitan than Puerto Iguazú, and has a keep-it-real feel that its Argentine counterpart lacks. On the downside, it's noisier, more chaotic and has more crime. It's not a particularly pretty place, but there's something appealing about it nonetheless.

Foz do Iguazu is at the confluence of Río Iguazu and Río Paraná; the Ponte Tancredo Neves links the city to Puerto Iguazú, Argen-

tina, across the Río Iguazu, while the Ponte da Amizade connects it to Ciudad del Este, Paraguay, across the Paraná. Fifteen kilometers upstream is Itaipú, the world's largest operating hydroelectric project.

Av das Cataratas leads 20km to the falls, passing the turnoff for the Argentine border on the way.

Sights

Itaipú

(☎0800-645-4645; www.itaipu.gov.br; Tancredo Neves 6702; ☎8am-6pm Sun-Thu, 8am-9pm Fri-Sat) With a capacity of 14 million kilowatts, this binational dam (Usina Hidrelétrica Itaipú) is the second largest hydroelectric power station in the world, and the one that produces most electricity per year. A controversial project, it plunged Brazil way into debt and necessitated large-scale destruction of rainforest and the displacement of 10,000 people. But it cleanly supplies nearly all of Paraguay's energy needs, and 20% of Brazil's.

The structure is impressive; at some 8km long and 200m high, it is a memorable sight, especially when the river is high and a vast torrent of overflow water cascades down the spillway. The **visitors center** is 10km north of Foz. From here, regular tours (*visita panorâmica*; R\$20.10) run daily on the hour (8am to 4pm inclusive); more detailed ones (*circuito especial*; R\$51, minimum age 14), which take you into the power plant itself, leave eight times daily. There's a night visit on Friday and Saturday at 8pm. A variety of other attractions within the complex include a museum, wildlife park and river beaches.

Across Av Juscelino Kubitschek from Foz's downtown local bus terminal, Conjunto C Norte buses (R\$2.65) run north every 10 minutes. It's better to catch the bus on the street rather than from inside the terminal, as it makes a circuit of the city after leaving the terminal before passing by it again.

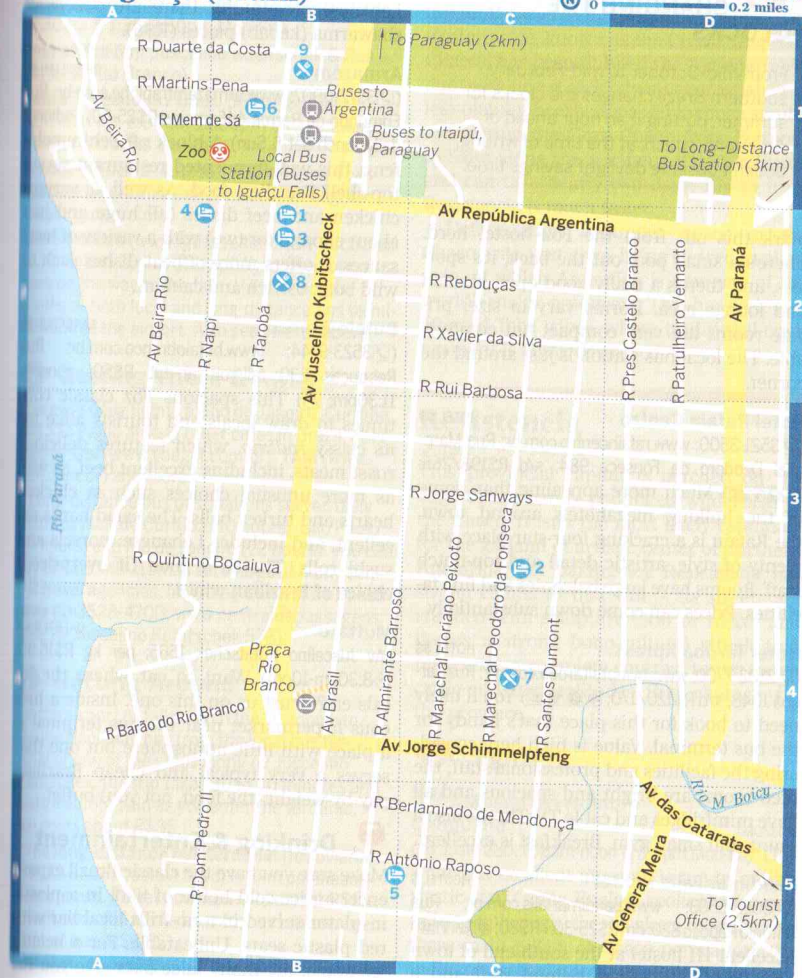
Tours

There are numerous travel agencies in Foz, and most hotels also have a tour desk. All can book you trips to either side of the falls, visits to Itaipú dam, walks and boat rides.

Sleeping

We've listed rack rates here, but normally you'll get a rate up to 40% lower. Don't be afraid to ask for a discount.

Foz do Iguazu (Brazil)



TOP PICK
Pousada Sonho Meu GUESTHOUSE \$
(☎3573-5764; www.pousadasonhomeufoz.com.br; Rua Mem de Sá 262; s/d R\$130/200; ☎☎☎☎)

What from the outside looks like an administrative building becomes a delightful oasis barely 50m from the local bus terminal. Guests have use of a kitchen and pool table, and are made to feel very welcome. Rooms are artistically decorated with bamboo.

Iguassu Guest House HOSTEL \$
(☎3029-0242; www.iguassuguesthouse.com.br; Rua Naipi 1019; dm R\$30-40, d R\$90-100; ☎☎☎☎)
Great facilities and welcoming management

Foz do Iguazu (Brazil)

Sleeping

- 1 Hotel del Rey B2
- 2 Hotel Rafain Centro C3
- 3 Hotel Tarobá Express B2
- 4 Iguassu Guest House A2
- 5 Paudimar Falls Hostel B5
- 6 Pousada Sonho Meu B1

Eating

- 7 Armazém C4
- 8 Búfalo Branco B2
- 9 Muffato B1



CHANGING THE CLOCKS

From mid-October to mid-February, southern Brazil changes the clocks for summer, putting it an hour ahead of Argentina, which, at the time of writing, doesn't observe daylight savings time.

mark this out from the Foz hostel herd. There's a small pool out the back, it's spotless, and there's a really good open kitchen and lounge area. Dorms vary in size; private rooms are very compact but comfortable. The local bus station is just around the corner.

Hotel Rafain Centro

HOTEL \$\$

(☎3521-3500; www.rafaincentro.com.br; Rua Marechal Deodoro da Fonseca 984; s/d R\$198/265; 🍷🍷🍷) Much more appealing than some of the hulking megahotels around town, the Rafain is a cracking four-star place with plenty of style, artistic detail and top-notch staff. Rooms have large balconies and fine facilities. Prices can come down substantially.

Hotel Tarobá Xpress

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎2102-7700; www.bwhoteltaroba.com.br; Rua Tarobá 1048; s/d R\$120/170; 🍷🍷🍷) You'll likely need to book for this place that's handy for the bus terminal. Value is high here considering the facilities and professional staff; the tiled rooms are bright and spacious and all have minifridges and cable TV. There's also a sauna and small gym. Breakfast is excellent.

Paudimar Falls Hostel

HOSTEL \$

(☎3028-5503; www.paudimarfalls.com.br; Rua Antônio Raposo 820; dm R\$25-30, r R\$80; 🍷🍷🍷) Excellent HI hostel at the south end of town with bags of facilities, helpful staff and a lively atmosphere. You can also camp here. There's another branch in big grounds off the road to the falls, 13km from town.

Hotel Del Rey

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎2105-7500; www.hoteldelreyfoz.com.br; Rua Tarobá 1020; s/d R\$180/255; 🍷🍷🍷) Friendly, spotless and convenient hotel. The rooms are spacious and comfortable, facilities are excellent and the breakfast buffet is huge.



Eating

It's easy to eat cheaply here. Many places will do you a soft drink and *salgado* (baked or fried snack) for as little as R\$3, and there are cheap local places where a buffet lunch

costs around R\$8 to R\$14. Thanks to the Lebanese community, there are dozens of shawarma (kebab) places (R\$6).

Armazém

BRAZILIAN \$\$

(☎3572-0007; www.armazemtrapiche.com.br; Rua Edmundo de Barros 446; mains R\$25-50; 🍷 dinner daily, lunch Sat & Sun) A block off Schimmelpfeng, this well-frequented restaurant serves top-shelf Brazilian food. As well as various chicken and beef dishes (all huge and just about enough for two) with a variety of tasty sauces, it offers more offbeat dishes such as wild boar, ostrich and caiman.

Búfalo Branco

BARBECUE \$\$

(☎3523-9744; www.bufalobranco.com.br; Rua Rebouças 530; all-you-can-eat R\$50; 🍷 noon-11:30pm; 🍷) This spacious Foz classic continues to draw locals and tourists alike for its classy *rodízio*, which features delicious roast meats, including excellent beef, as well as more unusual choices such as chicken hearts and turkey balls. The salad bar is excellent, and includes Lebanese morsels and sushi rolls. There's a good (if overpriced) choice of Brazilian wines.

Muffato

CAFETERIA \$

(Av Juscelino Kubitschek 1565; per kg R\$16.90, ☎8:30am-10pm) Want to eat where the locals eat? Trust us on this one. Inside a hideous hypermarket near the bus terminal is a place with little atmosphere but one that serves a very typical and cheap Brazilian pay-by-weight (the food, not you) buffet.



Drinking & Entertainment

Make sure you have the classic Brazil experience: an ice-cold bottle of Skol in a plastic insulator served in a no-frills local bar with red plastic seats. Unbeatable. For a healthier tippie, the many juice bars give you the chance to try exotic fruits such as *acerola*, *açai* or *cupuaçu*.

Nightlife in the city centers on Av Jorge Schimmelpfeng. The bars here all specialize in *chopp* (draft beer) and do food.

Information

Hotels and restaurants (and just about everything else including buses) in town accept US dollars, Paraguayan guaranías and Argentine pesos, but it's always cheaper to pay in Brazilian reals. There are useful foreign-card ATMs in the Muffato supermarket a block past the local bus terminal. Internet places are plentiful.

HSBC (Av Brasil 1131) One of several banks with an ATM around this area.

Paraguayan Consulate (☎3523-2898; Rua Marechal Deodoro da Fonseca 901; ☎8:30am-12:30pm & 1:30-3:30pm Mon-Fri)

Post office (cnr Juscelino Kubitschek & Rua Barão do Rio Branco)

Bafira Turismo (Av Brasil 567; ☎8:30am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8:30am-12:30pm Sat) Changes traveler's checks and cash.

Teletur (☎0800-451516; ☎7am-11pm) Toll-free tourist information service with English-speaking operators.

Tourist office (www.iguassu.tur.br; Av Cataratas 730; ☎7am-10pm) Unhelpfully located out of town on the way to the falls. Handier are the booths at both local and long-distance bus terminals and at the airport. Also see Teletur above.

Getting There & Away

There are daily flights to Rio de Janeiro, Curitiba and São Paulo among other cities in Brazil, operated by **Gol** (www.voegol.com.br), **TAM** (www.tam.com.br) and more.

Long-distance bus destinations served daily from Foz include Curitiba (10 hours), São Paulo (16 hours) and Rio de Janeiro (22 hours). You can buy tickets with a small surcharge at many central travel agencies, including **Central de Passagens** (☎3523-4700; www.centraldepassagens.com; Av Juscelino Kubitschek 526).

Getting Around

For the airport or falls, catch the 'Aeroporto/Parque Nacional' bus from the local bus terminal or one of the stops along Av Juscelino Kubitschek; the trip takes 30 to 40 minutes and costs R\$2.65, paid as you enter the terminal. A taxi costs about R\$35.

The **long-distance bus terminal** (rodoviária; ☎3522-3336; Costa e Silva) is 5km northeast of downtown. To get downtown, taxi it for R\$15 or walk downhill to the bus stop and catch any 'Centro' bus (R\$2.65).

Buses to Puerto Iguazú (R\$4/AR\$8) run along Rua Mem de Sá alongside the local bus terminal half-hourly from 8am until 8pm; they stop along Juscelino Kubitschek. Buses for Ciudad del Este, Paraguay (R\$4), run every 15 minutes (half-hourly on Sundays); catch them on JK opposite the local bus terminal.

THE GRAN CHACO

The Gran Chaco is a vast alluvial lowland, stretching north from the northern edges of Santa Fe and Córdoba provinces, across the entire provinces of Chaco and Formosa, and into Paraguay, Bolivia and Brazil. It reaches west through most of Santiago del Estero

province, drying up as it goes, and skirts the southeastern edge of Salta province. The western side, known as the Chaco Seco (Dry Chaco), has been dubbed the Impenetrable, due to its severe lack of water across an endless plain of nearly impassable thorn scrub.

Crossing the Gran Chaco from Formosa to Salta along the northern RN 81 is brutal and can take nearly two days; RN 16 from Resistencia is much faster.

Deforestation continues apace in the Chaco, with vast areas being cleared to plant soya, of which Argentina is now one of the world's major producers. This has seriously affected Toba tribes, whose traditional environment is being destroyed.

Resistencia

☎0362 / POP 390,874

This provincial capital is perched on the edge of the barely populated wilderness of the Chaco. It isn't the most likely candidate for the garland of artistic center of northern Argentina, yet baking-hot Resistencia has strong claims to that title – its streets are studded with sculpture (500 or more) and there's a strong boho-cultural streak that represents a complete contrast to the tough cattle-and-dust solitudes that characterize the province.

Sights

FREE Museo del Hombre Chaqueño

MUSEUM

(JB Justo 280; ☎8am-noon & 3-8pm Mon-Fri) This small but excellent museum is run by enthusiastic staff (some English spoken) who will talk you through the displays covering the three main pillars of Chaco population: the indigenous inhabitants (there are some excellent ceramics and Toba musical instruments here); the criollos who resulted from interbreeding between the European arrivals and the local populations; and the 'gringos' – the wave of mostly European immigration that arrived from the late 19th century onwards. Best of all is the mythology room upstairs, where you'll get to meet various quirky characters from Chaco popular religion.

FREE Sculptures

SCULPTURE

At last count, there were more than 500 sculptures around the city, a number that is set to increase with every Bienal (p198). The streets are packed with them, especially around the plaza

a house, this intimate, well-decorated restaurant is popular with suited diners from the nearby state parliament. A wide-ranging menu of pastas, meats soured in various sauces and long wine list make this a pleasant Chaco choice.



Drinking & Entertainment

El Fogón de los Arrieros BAR, LIVE MUSIC
(Brown 350; ☎9:30pm-1am) Stopping into El Fogón's friendly bar – a local institution for decades – is almost mandatory. The attached cultural center presents occasional live music and small-scale theatrical events, including Thursday night tango.

El Viejo Café

CAFÉ
(Pellegrini 109; ☎7am-late Sun-Thu, 1pm-late Fri & Sat) In an elegant old edifice, with an eclectically decorated interior, this is a fine choice at any time of day. Its terrace is a sweet spot for a sundowner, and it gets lively later on weekends.



Shopping

There's a selection of **artesanía stalls** on the southern side of the plaza.

Chac Cueros

LEATHER
(www.chaccueros.com.ar; Güemes 186) Specializes in quality goods made from the hide of

capybaras, valued for the suede produced from their tan, naturally dimpled skin.



Fundación Chaco

ARTESANAL
(fundacionchacoartesanal@gmail.com; Pellegrini 772) Selection of indigenous crafts as well as CDs from the Toba choir (see the boxed text, p200).

HANDICRAFTS

Information

There are several ATMs around Plaza 25 de Mayo and lots of internet places around the central streets.

Hospital Perrando (☎445-2583; Av 9 de Julio 1099)

Tourist office (☎445-8289; www.mr.gov.ar; Plaza 25 de Mayo; ☎8am-12:30pm & 2-8pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon & 3-7pm Sat, 6-9pm Sun) In a kiosk on the southern side of the plaza. Good bilingual city information.

Getting There & Away

From Aeropuerto San Martín, **Aerolíneas Argentinas** (☎444-5551; JB Justo 184) flies to Buenos Aires' Aeroparque almost daily. **Aerochaco** (☎0810-444-2376; www.aerochaco.com.ar; Av Sarmiento 715) services Córdoba three times a week.

Resistencia's **bus terminal** (☎446-1098; on MacLean & Islas Malvinas) serves destinations in all directions. Buses make the rounds between Corrientes and Resistencia (AR\$7,

40 minutes) at frequent intervals throughout the day. You can also catch a bus (AR\$2.50) to Corrientes from the city center, on Av Alberdi just south of the plaza. Faster are the shared taxis (AR\$7, 20 minutes) that congregate on Frondizi near Plaza 25 de Mayo.

Getting Around

Aeropuerto San Martín is 6km south of town on RN 11; take bus 2 from the northwest corner of the plaza. The bus terminal is a AR\$25 taxi ride from the city center, or you can take bus 3 or 10 from opposite the Hotel Colón.

Parque Nacional Chaco

Preserving several diverse ecosystems that reflect subtle differences in relief, soils and rainfall, this very accessible **park** (☎03725-499161; www.parquesnacionales.gov.ar; admission free; ☎visitors center 9am-7pm) protects 150 sq km of the humid eastern Chaco. It is 120km northwest of Resistencia via RN 16 and RP 9.



Activities

Hiking and **bird watching** are the principal activities here. From the main camp site, there are two short trails, one leading to viewpoints over lakes. A longer 12km road, suitable for cars, bikes, and horses, heads south to the Panza de Cabra lake. You can arrange guides, bikes, and horses in **Capitán Solari**, 6km east of the park.



Sleeping & Eating

The park's main campground is equipped, with power, toilets and drinking water. Though vendors sometimes appear at weekends, you should bring all your own food. In Capitán Solari ask at the *municipalidad* (city hall) for locals who rent rooms to travelers at a fair price.

Getting There & Away

Capitán Solari is 2½ hours from Resistencia by bus. La Estrella runs five buses daily (AR\$26).

From Capitán Solari, the park information may be able to organize transportation for you; otherwise you can walk, hitchhike or take a *remise* (AR\$25) the 5km to the park. The road may be impassable for motor vehicles in wet weather.

Roque Sáenz Peña

☎0364 / POP 96,944

Something of a frontier town, Presidencia Roque Sáenz Peña is well out in the Chaco,

INDIGENOUS GROUPS OF THE GRAN CHACO

With some 50,000 members, the **Toba** of the Gran Chaco are one of Argentina's largest indigenous groups, but their existence is nonetheless frequently ignored. Toba protests in 2009 highlighted the stark reality that many communities suffer from abandoned government facilities and, in some, people actually die of starvation. Few Argentines had any idea about the struggles of this *pueblo olvidado* (forgotten people).

As a traveler, it's easy to zip through the sun-scorched Chaco without ever noticing the presence of indigenous people, except, perhaps, for the crafts sold at government-sponsored stores or along the roadside. In Resistencia the Toba live in *barrios* (neighborhoods) that are separated from the rest of the city. And those who don't live in the city either live in towns that travelers rarely visit (such as Juan José Castelli or Quitilipi) or deep within the Argentine Impenetrable, in settlements reached only by dirt roads that are impossible to navigate if you don't know the way. If you do know the way (or you go with someone who does), you'll find Toba *asentamientos* (settlements) that are unlike anything else in Argentina. People live in extreme poverty (although there's always a church) and, except for the occasional government-built health center, nearly all buildings are made of adobe, with dirt floors and thatched roofs.

The Toba refer to themselves as Komlek (or Qom-lik) and speak a dialect of the Guaycurú linguistic group, known locally as Qom. They have a rich musical tradition (the Coro Toba Chelalaapi, a Toba choir founded in 1962, has Unesco World Heritage designation). Along with basket weaving and ceramics, the Toba are known for their version of the fiddle, which they make out of a gas can.

The region's most numerous indigenous group is the **Wichí**, with a population of over 60,000. Because the Wichí remain extremely isolated (they live nearly 700km from Resistencia, in the far northwest of Chaco province and in Formosa and Salta provinces) they are the most traditional of its groups. They still obtain much of their food through hunting, gathering and fishing. The Wichí are known for their wild honey and their beautiful *yica* bags, which they weave with fibers from the chaguar plant, a bromeliad native to the arid regions of the Chaco. Like the Toba, most Wichí live in simple adobe huts.

The **Mocoví** are the Gran Chaco's third-largest indigenous group, with a population of 17,000, concentrated primarily in southern Chaco province and northern Santa Fe. Like the Toba, the Mocoví speak a dialect of the Guaycurú linguistic group. Until the arrival of Europeans the Mocoví sustained themselves primarily through hunting and gathering, but today they rely mostly on farming and seasonal work. They are famous for their burnished pottery, which is the most developed of the Chaco's indigenous pottery.

For more information on the Toba, Wichí or Mocoví, stop by Resistencia's **Centro Cultural Leopoldo Marechal** (☎445-2738; Pellegrini 772; ☎9am-noon & 4-8pm Mon-Sat) which has crafts exhibits and a shop sponsored by the Fundación Chaco Artesanal, and the Museo del Hombre Chaqueño also in Resistencia. To journey into the Argentine Impenetrable to visit the Toba or Wichí, see p203.

BUSES FROM RESISTENCIA

DESTINATION	COST (ARS)	DURATION (HR)
Asunción (Paraguay)	70	5
Buenos Aires	298	13
Córdoba	267	14
Mendoza	525	24
Posadas	109	5½
Puerto Iguazú	205	10
Roque Sáenz Peña	45	2
Rosario	255	10
Salta	285	10
Santa Fe	189	7
Santiago del Estero	207	8
Tucumán	247	11

and is a gateway to the 'Impenetrable' beyond. It's known for its thermal baths, fortuitously discovered by drillers seeking potable water in 1937, and makes an appealing stop, with a rugged, friendly feel to the place.

Sights & Activities

Parque Zoológico ZOO
(adult/child AR\$6/1; ☉9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-6pm Sat & Sun) At the junction of RN 16 and RN 95, 4km east of downtown, the town's spacious zoo and botanical garden emphasizes birds and mammals found in the Chaco region, alongside a few lions, tigers and bears. Featured species are tapir and jaguar, but there are also crocodiles, llamas, monkeys, a bafflingly large chicken pen, snakes, condors and vultures.

Complejo Termal Municipal SPA
(www.elchacotermal.com.ar; Brown 545; ☉6:30-11:30am & 2:30-8pm) Roque's famous thermal baths draw their saline water from 150m below ground. The center, around since the 1930s, is now a top-class facility, offering thermal baths (AR\$10), saunas and Turkish baths (AR\$12). Treatments on offer include kinesiology, massage and aromatherapy. On Wednesdays it opens at 8am and at 4pm.

Sleeping

TOP CHOICE Atrium Gualok HOTEL \$\$
(☎442-0500; www.atriumgualok.com.ar; San Martín 1198; s/d AR\$270/340; 🏠🍷🍷) Right next to the spa complex, this fine modern hotel gives a feeling of space throughout. Rooms are indeed set around a lofty central atrium and are sleek, minimalist and great value for this standard

of place. There's an enticing pool area and the hotel has its own spa complex and casino. Substantial discount for paying cash.

Hotel Presidente HOTEL \$
(☎442-4498; San Martín 771; s/d AR\$130/180; 🏠🍷🍷) With plush red carpet and mirrors everywhere, including on the doors of the rooms, this looks like a cross between a Colombian narco-trafficker's mansion and a top-of-the-market 1970s brothel. It's a very pleasing place right in the heart of town, with friendly staff and, for this price, excellent rooms with minibar and comfortable beds.

Eating

The restaurant at Atrium Gualok is Roque's best.

Bien, José! PARRILLA \$
(25 de Mayo 531; mains AR\$20-45; ☺dinner) Warm personal service melds with delicious meat *empanadas* and decent *parrilla* choices at this good-value restaurant. Every generation is called José here, so ask one of them what the daily special is and enjoy. **Rovetti**, 20m up the road, does enormous *milanesas* (breaded cutlets) for AR\$25.

Giuseppe PIZZA \$
(Moreno 680; small pizzas AR\$20-35) This place has slightly staid decor but is extremely popular in the evening for its tasty pizza and interesting pasta combinations. Try not to sit down the side – the kitchen belts out so much heat you expect brimstone and horned waiters.

Ama Nalec ICE CREAM \$
(Moreno 601; ice creams from AR\$5; ☉10am-1pm & 5pm-late) This busy corner place does tempt-

WORTH A TRIP

PENETRATING THE IMPENETRABLE

If you have a yen to get off the beaten track, the more remote areas of the Chaco are for you. The key access point for the Impenetrable is the town of **Juan José Castelli**, 115km north of Roque Sáenz Peña, and served by two daily buses from Resistencia (AR\$77, five hours) via Roque. From Juan José Castelli, you can head west along *ripio* (gravel) roads to remote Fuerte Esperanza (shared *remises* run this route), which has two nature reserves in its vicinity – **Reserva Provincial Fuerte Esperanza** and **Reserva Natural Loro Hablador**. Both conserve typical dry Chaco environments, with algarrobo and quebracho trees, armadillos, peccaries and many bird species. **Loro Hablador**, 40km from Fuerte Esperanza, has a good campground and short walking trails with ranger guides. Fuerte Esperanza has two simple *hospedajes* (family homes). Further north, **Misión Nueva Pompeya** was founded in 1899 by Franciscans who established a mission station for Matacos in tough conditions. The main building, with its square-towered church, is a surprising sight in such a remote location.

Various operators offer excursions and packages, which include visits to the reserves, Misión Nueva Pompeya and indigenous communities in the area. **Carlos Aníbal Schumann** (☎0364-427-1073; www.ecoturcho.com.ar; Av San Martín 500, Juan José Castelli) comes recommended and also runs a campground and lodge in Villa Río Bermejito, a riverside settlement 67km northeast of Juan José Castelli. **Tantanacuy** (☎0364-449-7621; www.chacoagreste.com.ar) is a *hosteria* (lodging house) between Castelli and Fuerte Esperanza that offers packages with accommodations, transfers and excursions.

ing little pastries and very tasty ice cream, a godsend in Roque's paralyzing heat. It has some unusual flavors – figs in cognac is worth a lick.

Information

Av San Martín has several banks with ATMs and numerous internet/telephone places. There's tourist information available in the thermal baths complex.

Getting There & Away

The **bus terminal** (☎420280; Petris, btwn Avellaneda & López) is seven blocks east of downtown; take bus 1 from Mitre. There are regular buses to Resistencia (AR\$45, two hours), and services running west to Tucumán, Santiago del Estero Mendoza and Salta also stop here.

NORTH TOWARDS PARAGUAY

There are daily buses from Resistencia to Asunción, Paraguay's capital, making the crossing in Argentina's far north at **Clorinda**, a chaotic border town with little of interest beyond its bustling markets.

To stop somewhere more interesting en route, try baking-hot **Formosa**, a medium-sized city and provincial capital two hours north of Resistencia on the bus. Hotels, restaurants and services can be found along Avenida 25 de Mayo, which links the sleepy plaza with the waterfront on the Río Paraguay – the best place to stroll once the temperatures drop.

About 6km out of town, **Laguna Oca** offers good bird watching. For more, hit **Parque Nacional Río Pilcomayo**. This lies 126km northwest of Formosa and 55km west of Clorinda. Daily buses connect these towns with **Laguna Blanca**, an easy-paced citrus town, where you'll find inexpensive lodgings – **Residencial Guaraní** (cnr San Martín & Sargento Cabral) is the standout – and *remises* that will take you into the national park. In the park itself, the main feature is **Laguna Blanca**, where rangers can take you out in boats to spot caiman.