

Buenos Aires

By Jaime Cobas

Buenos Aires, Argentina is a popular tourist destination point because of generous discounts on airplane fares and a favorable exchange rate (it was 3.75 Argentine Pesos to US \$1.00 last time we looked). It is a thrilling starting point to a pleasurable vacation which will provide fabulous wines, endless cuts of grass fed beef, a lively nightlife and many cultural attractions, all at very affordable prices. One of the best ways to connect with the locals, the "porteños" as they are known, is to rent an apartment for a week or for the length of your stay, they are less expensive than a hotel, and are located in the various neighborhoods that are self sustaining enclaves.

I rented a duplex, one bedroom apartment, in the Las Cañitas neighborhood for about USD \$500.00 a week. It was well equipped, including TV, Internet connection (for your Skype calls) local telephone, doorman, and a swimming pool on the rooftop, which was an asset in the hot December month. Try Bairesapartments.com, they are very reliable, knowledgeable and speak English and Spanish.



Puente de la Mujer by Santiago Calatrava

Las Cañitas is a friendly neighborhood, populated by the military, adjacent to the polo field and populated by restaurants, mini markets, etc. I had a laundry around the corner where you took your things in the morning and they would be cleaned and pressed on the same afternoon, there was a pastry shop a few buildings down, that would deliver your morning croissants, a newspaper kiosk that delivered the local press and the "Herald" every morning, just by asking, and to be paid upon departure.

Getting around is best by taxi, they are plentiful, cheap and honest, no tip is expected, just round off your fare to the nearest peso. You can also call them for service.

If you have a good guidebook (Fodor's Buenos Aires is quite accurate and full of hints) you can

make your own daily itinerary. For special interests, I recommend Eternautas.com, they are university students that will tailor the visit to any special request. They are private journeys that range from “Architecture”, “Land of Tango”, “Art”, “JewishHeritage”, “Evita and Peronismo” etc. My guide, Martín, met me at the apartment and led me through a knowledgeable tour of modern architecture (my request) that culminated in Puerto Madero with the Santiago Calatrava Bridge, “ Puente de La Mujer”, that magically rotates to allow for passage of boats) and the new Fortabat Museum,by architect Rafael Viñoly that features a louvered operable roof that moves to control the sunlight that illuminates the skylit interior galleries.



Fortabat Museum by architect Rafael Viñoly



National Library by architect Clorindo Testa

It would seem that “porteños”, when not at home enjoying a “parillada”, eat out every single night; restaurants in all the neighborhoods are teeming with clients and it is a sport to socialize outside while waiting for a table, thus it is advisable to make reservations ahead of time. A good source for dining tips is the concierge at the Alvear Hotel, , stop by for afternoon tea and ask for suggestions or look at www.guiaoleo.com for tips and restaurant reviews by bloggers.

Epicurean delights

The Alvear Palace Hotel, www.alvearpalace.com in the Recoleta area, is the chicest, where visiting royalty stays, and its "La Bourgogne" restaurant is the frenchiest, and most expensive. Instead have afternoon "tea" in the cocktail area, try the "bocaditos" (assorted morsels) and ask for a wine list, (instead of ordering wines by the glass). Sit and enjoy the parade of visiting celebrities and, before leaving, ask the concierge for dining suggestions. Tip liberally for their recommendations are the choicest and the most up to date.

Relax with a late lunch at Valenti, "a fiambrería para picadas" in the Belgrano neighborhood. Sit at one of their tables, inside or outside, depending on the weather, and sample their delicacies, charcuteries and cheeses, accompanied by a "cava" (sparkling wine) or a carefully chosen wine from the curated options that line the walls and are for sale. Be careful you do not sample too many of the "bocaditos" offered, or you will be full before your main course arrives.

Although most of the local denizens will eat in for their "parilladas", (steaks, "achuras" (gizzards) and sausages grilled on an open fire) "La Escondida", in Nuñez is an excellent choice for an Argentinian dining experience. ; sitted in a thicket , sheltered by a huge tree, it is a fairy tale setting in the middle of a city.



Also try "Tegui" (info@tegui.com.ar), it was a delight. A non descriptive plain façade, with a solid wood door greets you, but do not worry, inside is a spacious room , overlooking a banana tree grove in a courtyard, open to the sky with seating for smokers. The high ceillinged main room, sports a double height, glass enclosed wine cellar, at the entrance that promises a gustatory experience. The menu is simple, it changes every four weeks, and is priced by the number of selections, 3 entrees are US\$ 34.00 and the "menú de degustación" of 6 plates plus

2 wine servings is US\$ 53.00 There are 3 choices for First, Second and Dessert. Service is impeccable and amenable. And for the culinary explorers, there is "Mosoq with " creative Asiatic and Peruvian cuisine" where you can enjoy "ceviches and tiraditos" (marinated and cut razor thin)

The wines from Mendoza, the capital of the wine region are well known and there are several wine shops that will provide samples, plus some wine tasting classes led by award winning sommeliers. The Malbecs are internationally recognized, try savoring the "Altos Las Hormigas" (2006), the "Caetana Zapata" (2005), or those from Rutini, that are highly prized. For contrast, also try the Tannants from Uruguay.

This may open your palate and your views to other horizons, maybe a trip to the Mendoza region or take the "Buquebus", a pleasant and comfortable three hour ferry ride that takes you to Montevideo, but that is another story.

About the author: Jaime Cobas is a practicing architect and professor of architecture in Puerto Rico. On occasion he writes architectural reviews for the local newspaper El Vocero.