

## Buenos Aires: The One with the Empty Restaurant

Ever since I saw the film *Evita*, I have been dying to go to Buenos Aires. There was dancing, there was history, and there was Antonio Banderas. That's all I needed to know to pack my bags. But it wasn't until I arrived that I found out that "Rio de la Plata" has more than just sensational Tango. Countless other cultural and historical gems abound in Buenos Aires.

I'll admit that apart from La Casa Rosada and a Tango Show, I didn't know much about the main attractions of the city, but not planning that much ahead made it seem like even more of an exciting, adventurous city. Rather than having an itinerary (and therefore preconceived expectations), I just let the city present itself to me—a travel approach that I would highly recommend! To get the most out of your time in B.A., I would suggest doing some of the top must-see attractions along with a few jaunts off-the-beaten path:

### 1. La Recoleta Cemetery

I know it seems morbid to start with a cemetery. Maybe my husband's dark side is starting to rub off on me. But these haunting resting grounds are now home to some of the most influential politicians, artists and thinkers in Argentinean history, so it seems fitting to pay homage to them first. It is most notably the final resting place of Eva Perón herself. The story of how Evita's corpse went missing for over 16 years, then sat in Juan Perón's kitchen and finally made it back to her homeland is macabre enough to give Tim Burton the chills. The above-ground mausoleums are so hauntingly beautiful that invariably your mind wonders about the life (and death) of each individual. I suggest going on a cloudy or rainy day—the somber weather adds an irresistible mystique. Plus, if you say, "Beetlejuice" three times, you never know what can happen!

### 2. Dinner Tango Show

This is by far one of the coolest cultural shows I have ever seen! Every single aspect of the experience was spectacular—the dancing, the food, the wine... This was true immersion into Argentine culture. I was so captivated by the Tango dancing, I almost forgot that I was working (filming). And the dinner... oh, my god. This is before I became a vegetarian but I have to say that the steak dinner was so delicious, I would probably revert back to being a carnivore if I were ever to even smell it again. And the wine blended so perfectly with the food, I was in seventh heaven. Wait, I didn't say that. I would never be caught drinking while on the job. <<hiccup!>>

### 3. La Boca

If you need something to wake you up in the morning, going for a stroll through La Boca ought to do the trick. It's one of the most colorful towns I've ever seen. All of the buildings are painted in bright, vibrant, primary colors making you feel like you stepped into a Leonid Afremov painting (Don't be ashamed to Google him.. I did). Local artists abound in the streets, stores and on street corners selling their creations. I'm pretty sure La Boca is considered the hippy part of B.A. as the Haight-Ashbury district in San Francisco and Venice in California come to mind while walking about. It's perfectly indicative of the

exciting, artistic energy of Argentine youth, and if you're not afraid of clowns or puppets, than the oversize statues of local celebrities scattered around the town are super fun to look at as well.

#### **4. Avenida 9 de Julio**

Avenida 9 de Julio is the main thoroughfare of Buenos Aires and is, in fact, the widest avenue on the planet. At one point, there are a total of 14 traffic lanes going across it! But I would forgo the rental car or taxi here. Just get dropped off and wander about wherever your feet take you. You can theoretically spend all day on this one street, going in and out of cafés, shops, Tango houses, and steakhouses and end up at the historic Obelisk of Buenos Aires, which stands right in the middle of the avenue. Being built in 1936, this iconic monolith has seen its fair share of political strife in the country, but I think it's endurance is a testament to how far Argentina has come as a nation.

#### **5. Casa Rosada**

"The Pink House" is the executive mansion of the President of Argentina, and the primary governmental house. And wow, is it pink! I wonder how manly the guards feel standing at attention in front of a house that looks like it was designed by Kim Kardashian. All jokes aside, it is a beautiful building. The house has quite a history and I like to think that the color is a calming reminder to see good in the world. I think more recent generations (myself included) are mainly familiar with this house as being the one with the balcony where Madonna sings "Don't Cry for Me, Argentina" in *Evita*. Something tells me that the real Eva Perón sang out there on the balcony in real life a few times. Perhaps on an occasional tipsy night around 3am where she couldn't resist the urge. Who could?

#### **6. Dinner at (any) Argentine Steakhouse**

Seeing as how we only had a few days in B.A., we just had to squeeze in yet another tasting of the local cuisine. Not eating steak here is like going to Hawaii and not wearing a lei around your neck. In fact, in Argentina, I'm surprised people aren't wearing steaks around their necks. Anyway, we took a taxi and showed up at 7pm—to an empty restaurant. Literally. The place probably had a capacity of at least 150 people, and we were the only ones there. I'd forgotten that, like Europe, Argentina eats dinner around nine or even ten o'clock. At 7pm, most Argentines are probably barely finishing their lunch. On the one hand, when you're the only guests in a restaurant, the service is superb. But on the other, the waiters have nothing to do but stand around staring at you, waiting for your next request. The place was packed by the time we left, and by then we could see why: delicious food and a beautiful, romantic atmosphere—apart from the thick slabs of cow meat on a stick being torched by flames near the foyer.

#### **7. El Ateneo Grand Splendid Bookstore**

I am such a nerd that one of the most exciting things that I saw in Buenos Aires was the El Ateneo Grand Splendid Bookstore. For a bookworm like me, it was sheer heaven! Set inside

a former theater of sensational beauty, I felt like I was in the Paris Opera House instead of an Argentine bookstore—although, the millions of books lining every inch ultimately gave it away. But the magic is embedded in the red curtains, the crimson carpets and the ornate gold-leaf décor. I love it because it is two pure art forms melding into one large sanctuary of creativity, expansion and discovery. I would live in it if I could. In fact, they have a coffee shop inside with cappuccinos and sandwiches, so technically there would be no conceivable reason for me to ever leave. It's no wonder why *The Guardian* declared it number two on their list of the the most beautiful bookshops in the world.

It's probably sad to admit that my desire to go to Buenos Aires stemmed from a Hollywood movie musical starring Madonna. But at least it got me there. And in my exploration, I discovered an exciting city full of culture, history and beauty. People didn't break out into song in the middle of the streets as I'd hoped, but I was quite taken with the city and can't wait to go back.

Which films have you seen that have inspired you to travel to a city?