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The Argentine city seduces—with cafés, curvaceous architecture and steak cut a million ways

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Yadid Levy

Gauchos parade on horseback at The Mataderos fair.

Buenos Aires has always had an air of the mythical about it. The city's favorite son (not counting football star Diego Maradona), writer Jorge Luis Borges once penned, "To me, it seems a mere tale that Buenos Aires had a beginning: I judge her to be as eternal as water and air."

It does seem to exist outside of normal geography. Buenos Aires is full of Belle Époque mansions and Haussmannesque boulevards built at the turn of the 20th century, when it was one of the world's most glamorous cities. Yet it's plonked between the vast, flat Rio de la Plata and the even vaster green plains of the pampas. Are we in Latin America or Western Europe? The 19th century or the 21st?

Photos: Air of the Mythical



View Slideshow

Yadid Levy

Buenos Aires's richly mixed heritage and turbulent past seem to play into every facet of its culture, including its dark cinema, diverse (yet perpetually meat-heavy) cuisine, the wild street art that bedecks the neighborhoods of Palermo and Villa Crespo, a counterpoint to the graceful décor of the bars and eateries. The local dialect, with its Neapolitan cadences and sprinkling of lunfardo (B.A. slang), makes the locals hard to follow. But who cares

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Paseo del Filete

what they're saying? They look so good as they gesticulate passionately in the city's overflowing cafés or file into its

steakhouses, entire family in tow, for dinner at 10 p.m.

And even if you can't understand Argentines, or their crazy history and even madder economics, you can do as the porteños do: Put on an impeccable outfit, head out into the streets and drink in the heady blend of old-world charm and emerging-economy brashness. These days, the city's famous melancholy is cut with ample doses of optimism—and after all, it's spring.

—Sarah Gilbert



ROBERT DUVAL

The Actor

Robert Duvall

Academy Award-winning actor; husband of Argentine actress Luciana Pedraza

Horseplay // Argentine Open Polo Championship. In the late spring, this event brings polo to the middle of the city. It's quite nice, with a fashion parade and a cook-out and everything. *Nov. 19 to Dec. 10, Campeonato Argentino Abierto, Avenida del Libertador and Avenida Dorrego; aapolo.com*

Cozy Café // La Biela. I like to sit there late at night or early in the morning and talk, read or study. I order una lagrima—a teardrop—which you can only get in Argentina. It's a drop of coffee in a small cup, topped off by hot milk. *Avenida Presidente Manuel Quintana 600; labiela.com*

Dance Studio // Carlos Copello tango school. In the Abasto area, right near the Carlos Gardel House museum. We go there and hang out. Copello is a great guy to talk to—he's a real character, a fun-loving guy. He lays that accent on thick! *Anchorena 575; carloscopello.com*

Low-Key Digs // Etoile Hotel. We stay at this little hotel right near La Biela. We've stayed all over that city, but La Etoile is very modest and very handy. *Roberto M Ortiz 1835; etoile.com.ar*

Classic Mall // Abasto Shopping. Abasto is one of my favorite neighborhoods—the people are very friendly. I go up in that shopping center, which used to be a food market, and get a cheap little asado. It's phenomenal what they do with their meat in Argentina. *Avenida Corrientes 3247; abasto-shopping.com.ar*



NARDA LEPES

The Foodie

Narda Lepes

Local chef, author and television personality

Major Spectacle // The Mataderos fair. On weekends you can see gauchos parading on their horses. It's very popular but it's very local. There's craftsmanship on display as well—handmade knives, ponchos and things from the provinces. *Avenida Lisandro de la Torre and Avenida de los Corrales; feriademataderos.com.ar*

Modern Fare // Café San Juan. You can see the whole kitchen in this small, family-run place. The guy cooks from his heart—it's very masculine cooking—and there's a lot of flavor in what he does. I like the tapas. He always serves beef, and also game. *Avenida San Juan 450; 11-4300-1112*

Traditional Dishes // Oviedo. It's a classic, upscale place with great cheese and the best wines in town. It's Argentine food—the ingredients are very local—but you'll see lots of Spanish recipes too. *Beruti 2602; oviedorest.com.ar*

Best Beef // El Pobre Luis. I like different cuts in different places. But I go there for ojo de bife (rib-eye) and mollejas (veal sweetbreads). You have all this football paraphernalia around and you can see the parrilla, or grill, and watch how the guys work. *Arribeños 2393; 11-4780-5847.*



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Groovy Glasses// Carla Di Sí. The best shops are in Palermo—I start at El Salvador and Armenia streets. This spectacle shop has a great collection, including designs that she makes herself from Italian materials. *Gurruchaga 1677*; carladisi.com.ar

GUSTAVO
SANTAOLALLA

The Music Man

Gustavo Santaolalla

Academy Award-winning composer, musician, producer and winemaker born in Buenos Aires

Live Music // La Trastienda Club. It's a small enough place that you can really engage with whoever is playing. There's a bar in the front where you can have a bite, and Monserrat is a great part of town. Go there to listen to under-the-radar acts. *Balcarce 460*; latrastienda.com

Grand Hotel// Alvear Palace Hotel. I like something that's more traditional, and the service is amazing. It's also very close to Centro Cultural Recoleta, a great place to see new art and photography. *Avenida Alvear 1891*; alvearpalace.com

Italian-Inspired Food// Pierino. It's like an Italian cantina, full of tango memorabilia. They serve homemade Italian food, and there's not really a menu—they just bring you stuff. It's always packed. *Lavalle 3499*; 11-4864-5715

Tango Tunes// Torquato Tasso and La Catedral. I'm not very fond of the tango shows. I'd rather go to this bar to hear live tango music or to the real milongas to dance tango or to watch. Tuesday nights at Catedral, a very bohemian place in Almagro, are unbelievable. *Torquato Tasso: Defensa 1575*; torquatotasso.com.ar; *La Catedral: Sarmiento 4006*; 11-4342-4794

Record Store// Zivals. One of my favorite music stores. They have an incredible collection of Argentinian music, from tango to folk, rock and pop. *Avenida Callao 395 and other locations*; zivals.com



MARTA MINUJÍN

The Artist

Marta Minujín

Pop artist and Warhol collaborator

Caffeine Shot// Chez Pauline. I like to have coffee every morning with my friends there or at Le Pont, which is in my neighborhood and never closes. I love to go to the Florida Garden Café on Saturdays, when all the artists and painters of the city meet at midday. *Chez Pauline: Juncal 1695*; chezpauline.com.ar; *Le Pont: Montevideo 1300*; 11-4811-9163; *Florida Garden: Florida 899*; 11-4312-7902

Meat Treat// La Rambla. I don't generally like restaurants, but I am fond of this spot at Ayacucho and Posadas streets in Recoleta. It's a café-bar—not at all formal—and it has the city's best steak sandwich. *Posadas 1602*; 11-4804-6958

Modern Art// Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires. MALBA is my favorite museum, full of 20th century and contemporary art. I know all the people there, and they sell some of my things in the shop. I also go to their café to drink their marvelous fruit drinks. *Avenida Figueroa Alcorta 3415*; malba.org.ar

Chic Shop// Min Agostini. Their clothes are very angular, industrial-looking. They make my overalls—I am always in overalls, and in black. Whenever I find black pants or shirts, I buy them. *Libertad 1532*; minagostini.com.ar

Fresh Gallery// Ruth Benzacar Galeria de Arte. You can buy the work of all the best young artists there. They have a few things of mine, as well. *Florida 1000*; ruthbenzacar.com

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restaurantepatagoniasur.com **Street Art** | Graffiti is the preferred medium of some of the city's leading artists. Take a guided tour of the best walls with Graffiti Mundo. graffitimundo.com

Corrections & Amplifications

In Buenos Aires, the Mataderos fair is at Avenida Lisandro de la Torre and Avenida de los Corrales, and the store Min Agostini is at Libertad 1532. An earlier version of this article misspelled one of the fair's cross streets as Avenida Lisandra de la Torre and misspelled the store's street as Libertád.

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