

Buenos Aires, Latin America's most fashionable and fascinating city, is enjoying something of a renaissance. A new breed of 'boutique' hotels is emerging which offer a more personal experience of this vibrant metropolis.



FACT FILE

A ten day trip to Argentina including four nights in Buenos Aires costs from £2,225 per person based on two people sharing. For further details contact Malachy, Anthony, Susie or Jon on 01993 838 600.



BUENOS AIRES

Latin America's Favourite City

Since the traumas of Argentina's most recent economic crisis, at the end of 2001, a battered country is gradually getting back on its feet. Nowhere is the feeling of cautious optimism more obvious than in Buenos Aires, where art, music and cinema are flourishing again. Many of its grimy inner city streets have been newly scrubbed to reveal their long-hidden charms, and it's no surprise that this renewal is reflected in a tourist industry that's rapidly developing to meet changing tastes.

The city's most luxurious hotels, like the famous Alvear Palace in the well-heeled district of Recoleta, have recently been supplanted by a new breed of more intimate 'boutique' hotels. In the last year or two dozens have opened up, and all of them can offer insights into one of the world's most stylish and culturally diverse cities. They're also an unbeatable way of experiencing the memorable hospitality of the *porteños*, as the inhabitants of Buenos Aires are known.

Over the next page or two we'll share with you some of Buenos Aires' best-kept secrets, three small hotels which will guarantee you a memorable stay in the city.

The Mansion Dandi Royal has been a favourite of ours for some time. It's unlike anywhere else, combining the facilities of a hotel with those of a tango academy. Whether you want to dance or simply enjoy the atmosphere, it's the perfect introduction to Buenos Aires' greatest export. There are Art Deco touches throughout the hotel, in keeping with the building's architecture, and murals of the great tangueros on its walls. In its two basement ballrooms, nightly performances by local musicians and dancers take place.

You'll find the Mansion in the *barrio*, or neighbourhood, of San Telmo. Centrally-located at the core of the city's historic district, its cobbled streets and plazas with their teeming markets are full of history and atmosphere.

A few blocks from San Telmo is Montserrat, similar in feel, though Montserrat hasn't yet caught up with San Telmo in terms of its

regeneration. There are fewer tourists, and it retains some of its scuffed-up urban charm. La Cayetana is an oasis of easygoing elegance in a colonial townhouse dating from 1820, where we've been sending Audley travellers for the last six months. All have returned with stories of the warm hospitality of the proprietors Estela and Silvina.

I called Estela to find out how her hotel project came about. She told me that she and Silvina had found the house in a state of near total ruin in 2000, and had worked tirelessly for the next five years to renovate it. The building itself is very traditional; a series of three patios, surrounded by 11 en suite bedrooms. The décor is a mix of period furniture, with rustic touches reminiscent of pampa estancias. The indoor garden is a rare luxury, especially during Buenos Aires' sultry summer months.

According to Estela, her intention has always been to offer "the warmth of a hearth", making sure that all guests get a very personal welcome. "I like being able to sit down with them over a coffee and discuss their day, help them make plans and get acquainted with the city. We want to be a home a long way from home. For us this is the best definition of what we do here."

The district that has benefited most from the recent explosion in tourism is Palermo, on the city's wealthier north side. This is where you'll find a profusion of hip new bars and boutiques, not to mention a few longer-established entertainments, such as the racecourse, the polo ground, and the city's biggest park. When I was living in Palermo seven years ago, it was known as Palermo Viejo (old Palermo), and my neighbourhood in particular as Palermo Sensible (sensitive Palermo).

It's often been said that Buenos Aires has more plastic surgeons than Los Angeles, and more 'shrinks' than New York, and the 'sensitive' sobriquet was due to the alarming quantity of the latter in Palermo. It's a sign of the times that in the last few years the neighbourhood has changed again and new names have been adopted.



La Cayetana entrance



Dandi Royal interior



Costa Petit patio pool

Again there's a nod towards North America, and now Palermo is divided into Palermo Hollywood, inhabited by models and moviemakers, and Palermo SoHo, where you'll find exceptional restaurants and bars. It's also in this part of town that you'll find the Costa Petit. This is a hotel with only four rooms, conceived and built from the rubble of an old mechanics' workshop, though you would never guess it. The attention to detail at the Costa Petit is flawless, from the design concept to the service and overall experience. With unexpected luxuries like its own tea sommelier, it raises the bar for the rest of the city's boutique hotels. With a reputation that's growing every day, and only four rooms, you'd do well to book in plenty of time.

With each of Buenos Aires' barrios having its own distinctive atmosphere and identity, where you stay will colour your impressions of the city. Whichever of these hotels you choose though, you can be certain of a memorably warm and personal welcome.

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Argentina Specialist



La Cayetana