



Buenos Aires is a city of broad boulevards, grand architecture and lush green spaces. It is a city of elegance and sophistication, albeit a bit faded and frayed. But above all, the Argentine capital is a city of romance:

Everywhere you go in Buenos Aires, you see hints of it. Couples stroll hand-in-hand along a boulevard, embrace on a park bench or carry on a quiet conversation at a sidewalk cafe, seemingly oblivious to the snarling traffic and bustling crowds around them.

To a visitor of this sprawling city of 11 million inhabit-

ants, it quickly becomes apparent that Argentines are a passionate people. But there have been times in the country's history when emotions ran so deep that much of the population focused its affections on a single individual.

One of the most enduring romantic images of Buenos Aires is that of "Evita", the charismatic wife of Juan Peron,



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It's old world, chocolate box pretty, quiet and peaceful, with delightful narrow streets, pavement cafes, squeaky clean houses with tiny wrought-iron balconies

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Argentina's president from 1946 to 1955. Maria Eva Duarte was an actress and Peron the country's Minister of Labor when they met, but after they married, she applied her talent to promoting her husband's political ambitions.

Together, the Perons introduced reforms such as the legalization of trade unions, voting rights for women, and political rights and economic benefits for the working class.

They were rewarded with the adulation of the common people and the alienation of aristocrats.

Today, one of the most popular tourist attractions in Buenos Aires is Casa Rosada, the "Pink Palace" where Evita and Peron stood on the balcony to address impassioned masses gathered in Plaza de Mayo. The presidential palace, which includes a basement museum exhibit



ing personal effects of its former residents, features a brief changing-of-the-guard ceremony every two hours throughout the day.

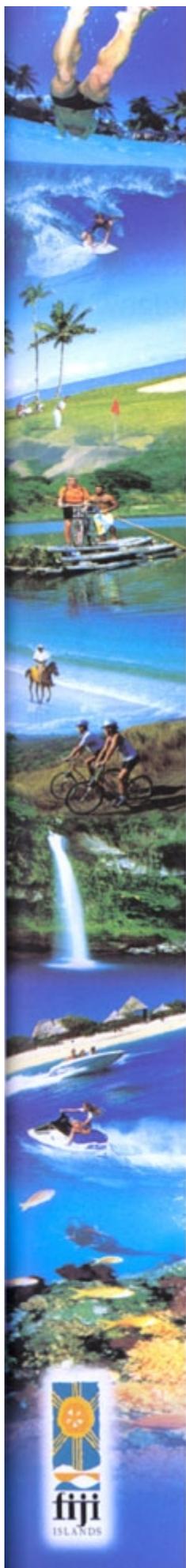
Other noteworthy buildings on Plaza de Mayo are Museo del Cabildo, the first government house in Argentina, built in 1790, now a historical museum, and Catedral Metropolitana, the main Catholic church in Buenos Aires, completed in 1827, containing the tomb of independence leader General Jose de San Martin.

Plaza de Mayo continues to be the site of political demonstrations. Each Thursday at 3 p.m., the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo march around the Piramide de Mayo, a small obelisk at the center of the square. The “mothers” are campaigning for full disclosure concerning citizens who “disappeared” during the Dirty War, the military government’s reign of terror from 1976 to 1983.

Evita was only 33 years old when she died of cancer in 1952. There was a tremendous outpouring of grief from the Argentineans who loved her, but she was not allowed to rest in peace. Her remains were “kidnapped” by General Pedro Aramburu, an agent of the military junta that eventually overthrew Peron, in fear that Evita’s grave would become a rallying point for Peron followers. Evita’s body was hidden in various locations in Argentina before being secretly interred in Milan, Italy, under a false name.

In an ironic turn of events, Aramburu was assassinated by the Peron faithful in 1970 and his body held





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for ransom until Argentina's military government returned Evita's body to Peron, who was living in exile in Madrid, Spain. Now, Aramburu lies just a few rows away from Evita in Cementerio de Recoleta.

The cemetery has been the final resting place for generations of Argentina's rich and famous. Located in the fashionable barrio of Recoleta behind Iglesia de Nuestra Senora de Pilar, a colonial church consecrated in 1732, it is a miniature village of ornate marble tombs, some topped with steeples or statues, others decorated with stained glass or brass details.

Even in death, Evita attracts admirers. A steady stream of visitors makes its way through the maze of mausoleums to the relatively modest Duarte family tomb. Many leave handwritten notes and fresh flowers tucked into the metal grille on its door.



Another legendary romantic figure draws almost as many devotees to the less exclusive Cementerio de Chacarita, far across town on the outskirts of Buenos Aires. Carlos Gardel, whose



life-sized statue stands next to his tribute-encrusted tomb, is credited with taking the tango out of Buenos Aires brothels and elevating it to the world stage.

The seductive dance, consisting of a long walk with successive intertwined steps, was originally considered indecent by Argentine high society. The guitar and violin music that accompanied it was viewed as an insignificant expression of the lower classes. Then came Gardel, with his baritone voice and charming personality.

Although he was born in France, Gardel was brought to Buenos Aires by his single mother when he was two years old. He grew up in a poor barrio, working at various menial jobs but also singing tango to amuse himself and friends. He soon discovered that he could make money as a singer, and when he became a solo performer in 1917, the 27-year-old was an immediate success.

Gardel appeared regularly on radio and began making records. As his popularity spread, he toured throughout Latin America and eventually to France, Spain and the United States. Acceptance by audiences in these distant places finally made tango more palatable to elite Argentines.



Later, Gardel made the transition to films, working under contract to Paramount Pictures. In 1935, he was on a promotional tour for his last movie, "El día que me quieras" or "The Day You Love Me," when he died in a plane crash in Medellin, Colombia. Some women reportedly attempted suicide upon hearing the news, and fans flocked to view his coffin as he lay in state in Medellin, New York, Rio de Janeiro, Montevideo and finally Buenos Aires.

In life, Gardel was revered as El Zorzal Criollo, "the songbird of Spanish America," but like Evita, his untimely death gave him a sort of immortality. He remains forever young, smiling in photos that still adorn the walls of cafes and tango clubs throughout Buenos Aires.

Gardel's legacy is that tango today is a respected, though



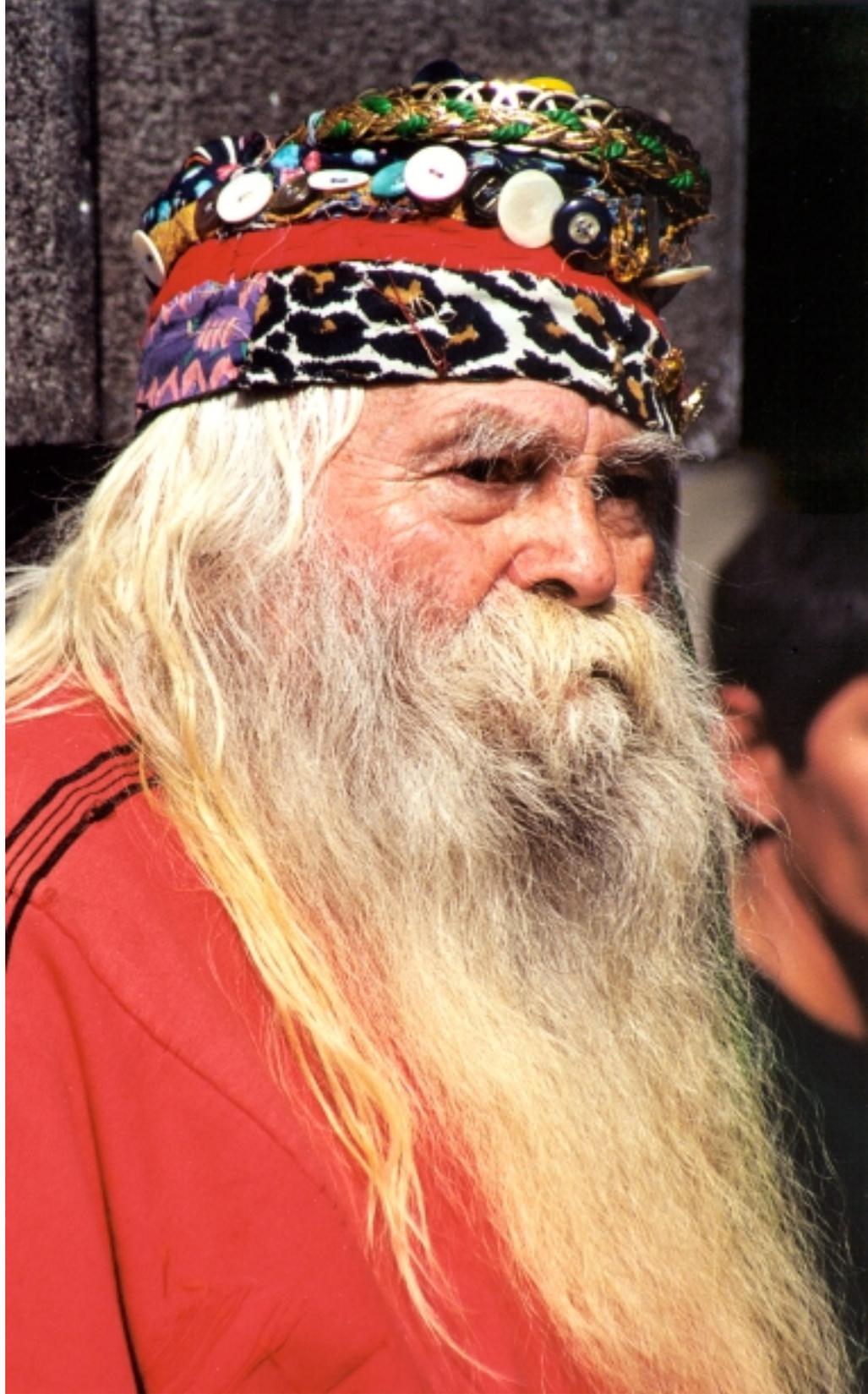
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nonetheless sensual, art form. Downtown clubs catering to tourists offer a typical Argentine dinner and a glitzy tango show for an "all inclusive" price, but intimate venues in the barrio of San Telmo, south of Plaza de Mayo, provide a more authentic experience.

San Telmo is an artists' quarter, with galleries and antique shops occupying the buildings of various styles and ages that line its narrow cobblestone streets. The area includes a number of museums, among them Museo San Roque at the Basilica San Francisco, housing art from the colonial period, and Museo de Arte Moderno, featuring works by Dali, Picasso and others.

The barrio's Plaza Dorrego is the setting each Sunday for a flea market that brings together artists, shopkeepers and street performers. There's frequently a couple dancing tango while a musician plays the bandoneon, the accordion-like instrument that replaced the guitar and violin as traditional accompaniment.

Tango also is found in the streets of La Boca, literally the most colorful barrio in the city. The district's other-



wise unremarkable old buildings are painted a rainbow of brilliant colors, making them prime targets for anyone armed with a camera. Artists and entertainers vie for tourist dollars along Caminito, a popular pedestrian walkway.

Since the restoration of democracy

in 1984, Buenos Aires has again become a popular destination. With an improved economy, efforts are being made to restore landmarks and increase tourist services. But the romantic spirit of its people remains one of its major attractions.

IFYOU GO

Getting There: Aeropuerto Internacional de Ezeiza, located about 45 minutes by car west of downtown Buenos Aires, is served by Qantas and Aerolineas Argentinas from Auckland. Car rental agencies include Dollar and Thrifty. Taxi fare from the airport to the center of downtown runs between US\$35 and US\$40. Shuttles are operated by San Martin Bus (phone 4314-4747), Manuel Tienda Leon (phone 4314-3636 or 4480-0374) and Annie Millet Transfers (phone 4816-0101).

Getting Around: Buenos Aires has five subway lines and one streetcar line that operate from 5 a.m. to 10 p.m. Mondays through Saturdays and from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. Sundays and holidays. General fare is US50 cents. Also, 140 bus routes provide 24-hour service throughout the city. Each bus is equipped with an electronic ticket machine that accepts only coins. Thousands of black and yellow taxis cruise the streets. Initial fare is US\$1.12, with US14 cents added for every 200 meters or one



minute. An additional US\$1.50 is charged for summoning a cab by telephone.

Climate: Buenos Aires tends to be mild and humid. Average temperatures are 28 C in summer (December through February), 12 C to 15 C in autumn (March through May), 3 C to 8 C in winter (June through August), and 18 C to 20 C in spring (September through November).

Language: Spanish is the official language, but English is widely spoken in hotels, restaurants and shops.

Currency: The Argentine currency is the peso, which has a value equal to that of the United States dollar.

Tipping: At restaurants and cafes, a 10 per cent tip is customary. For other services, the amount of tip is discretionary.

Explore: Mar del Plata further down the coast, or fly north to Brazil's Rio de Janeiro and its beautiful white sand beaches.