

Argentina Travel Journal

I'm starting to write this travel journal in the American Express Centurion lounge at the Buenos Aires airport, waiting to board my flight home after being in Argentina for a week. This is the first chance I've had to sit down and write as we complete a busy and interesting week in South America with Marcy and Steven Lippman. This journal will be more of a recap of the week than a blow-by-blow detail that you may be accustomed to from me.

Friday, August 2, 2019 - Flight to Buenos Aires, Argentina

The nine-hour flight from Miami to Buenos Aires (BA) was uneventful. Lori and I flew with Steven, as Marcy was already in BA for the past week at a Jewish Federation gathering. After checking into the Alvear Palace Hotel, the three of us went out for empanadas (of course) for dinner. Total bill for the three of us, including a generous tip, was \$11. At this point we knew the food in BA was going to be inexpensive. We were right.

Saturday, August 3 – Buenos Aires

Today we wandered around a street fair and toured the Recoleta Cemetery with a guide named Simon, who hangs out in front of the



cemetery and guides for tips only. We think he was very knowledgeable as he showed us

around the graves of famous people in Argentine history. If he wasn't knowledgeable, he was a great storyteller and still worth the tip we gave him. Marcy was still busy with her meetings today, so the three of us went to dinner at a steak restaurant near the hotel. Appetizers, huge delicious steaks, for which Argentina is famous for, side dishes, a bottle of wine AND dessert AND a generous tip came to a fraction of what we



pay at home. We picked the wrong year to attempt vegetarianism. I ate more steak this week than I've eaten in the last 25 years combined. Throughout the week we would overeat and enjoy Malbec wine from the Mendoza area of Argentina at every meal.

Sunday, August 4 — Jewish Tour

The three of us toured BA all day with Ernesto, the famous BA tour guide/rabbi/college dean/historian. We learned about the history of Argentina in general and specifically the roles the Jews played in that history. We learned about the Crypto-Jews from Spain and Portugal that hid their Jewish identity from the Catholics and about Evita and Juan Peron, who left their mark on local history. We also visited the Holocaust Memorial in the BA Cathedral, where Pope Francis was the Arch Bishop





before becoming Pope. That may be the only Holocaust Memorial inside a Catholic cathedral in the world. It was a fascinating day. We had lunch at a kosher restaurant in Once, the Jewish orthodox section of BA and dinner at another steakhouse. Marcy joined us for dinner at this point and for the rest of the trip. Dinner was another gluttonous event with the price coming in at about a third of what it would cost at home.

Monday, August 5 — Food Tour, Tango Show

Today the four of us did a food tour in San Telmo, the section of BA that the Italian immigrants settled in upon their arrival in the 19th and early 20th centuries. We tried all sorts of local food and ended in an ice cream parlor, where Lori and I demonstrated our tango skills and had further instruction from our guide Antonia, who happened to be an ex-professional dancer. Probably the first time that anyone danced the tango in that ice cream shop. That night we went to a real Tango Dinner Show. Marcy and Steven did a wine tasting while Lori and I chose a tango lesson for the preceding free activity. The show was excellent but discouraging, as I realized how far I have to go to dance anything that even resembles the tango. And I can't practice alone, because it takes two to tango!

Tuesday, August 6 — Bike Tour

We started today with a bike tour around BA, seeing a lot of the city highlights. The four of us had the tour to ourselves with the guide, as it's winter in Argentina and not the tourist season. We drank maté (pronounced ma-tay) the popular South American tea-like drink that's shared between friends from the same straw/strainer. We rode and walked around La Boca, home of the Boca Juniors soccer team, then mistakenly rode our bikes into the main city square, Plaza de Mayo, during a major protest/demonstration/rally being held in preparation for country-wide primary elections this Sunday. Lunch afterwards was at a Paraguayan restaurant where we ordered so much food we couldn't eat half of it. Into the garbage it went, as it's considered barbarian to take leftovers home from a restaurant in BA.



We stopped and did some shopping on the way home, buying multiple high-quality leather jackets per person at prices too good to pass up. I needed two new jackets like I needed a hole in the head, but when in Buenos Aires...



Wednesday, August 7 — Colonia

Today we were picked up at 6:45am (this is a vacation?) to catch an 8am ferry to Colonial de Sacramento, Uruguay. The 50-minute boat ride crosses the Rio de la Plata river to the original Portuguese, then Spanish settlement in the area. We toured the historic area, had lunch (which was an even better bargain than in BA), and rented a golf cart to drive around town. Driving a cart on a golf course didn't really prepare Steven Lippman for driving one in traffic in Uruguay. We then returned by ferry to BA and had dinner at Mishiguene, a trendy restaurant that specializes in Jewish immigrant food. We again

over-ordered and couldn't believe how low the final check was.

Thursday, August 8 — Tigre Delta

Today we toured the San Isidro neighborhood where the upper class of Buenos Aires in the 1800 and early 1900's had weekend mansions. We then took a boat ride around the Tigre Delta, where the Parana, Paraguay and Uruguay Rivers flow into the Rio de la Plata. On our drive back to BA we stopped at the location where Adolf Eichmann was captured by the Israeli Mossad in 1960. The neighborhood has changed a lot since its depiction in the movies "The House on Garibaldi Street" and "Operation Finale." Dinner at the steak restaurant in the hotel was delicious, and the maitre'd just happened to have worked on the cruise ship we'll be on next month in Europe. Stay tuned for those journals.

Friday, August 9

On our last day in Argentina we toured the Teatre Colón opera house, one of the most beautiful opera houses in the world. We then had lunch at the famous Don Julio Parilla, another steak restaurant. Notice the trend? They eat a lot of steak in Argentina! After collecting our altered leather jackets, we headed to the airport for our flights home. Marcy and Steven had an earlier flight than Lori and me, and they barely made their flight due to heavy traffic on the highway. Because they also had too many bags than their allotment and we know how to pack, we took one of their pieces of luggage which contained a painting that they had an artist from a street fair paint for them. It turns out that no artwork can leave the country without a permit from the federal Ministry of Culture, to protect against Argentine art being plundered by foreigners. This pertains to everything from a nursery school finger-painting to an artistic masterpiece, which sometimes are hard to tell apart. We didn't have the required permit, we were already at the airport ready to depart, and the Ministry office didn't reopen until Monday morning. Now we have this huge luggage tube containing a rolled painting that we can't take with us. We attempted to leave it with someone at the airport so the artist could



retrieve it and ship it to the US, but no one would take it. We couldn't even give it away, and we were afraid to just leave it somewhere as we could cause a major incident with a large abandoned tube being mistaken as an explosive. We asked a policeman what to do and he said we could just leave it, which we ended up doing. We thought about folding it up and trying to smuggle it through in our carry-on, which would have probably ruined the painting anyway, and decided it wasn't a smart thing to do. Good thing, as our bags were inspected again just prior to boarding and I can't imagine Argentine prisons are anything like our 5-star BA hotel. They do, however, probably serve steak, as not doing so could be considered cruel and unusual punishment in Argentina. We'll never know what happened to that painting. It could either be hanging in an airport janitor's living room, in a landfill, or exploded by the Buenos Aires bomb squad taking precautions with abandoned luggage.

We're now back at home resting and getting ready for our trip to Europe next month with the Weismans. Watch for future travel journals.

Love,
Lori and Stephen

