



Boundary representations are not necessarily authoritative.

## BACKGROUND

### Land and Climate

Argentina is the-eighth largest country in the world; it is somewhat smaller than India and about four times as big as the U.S. state of Texas. Its name comes from the Latin word *argentum*, which means “silver.” Laced with rivers, Argentina is a large plain rising from the Atlantic Ocean, in the east, to the towering Andes Mountains, in the west, along the Chilean border. The Chaco region in the northeast is dry, except during the summer rainy season. Las Pampas, the central plains, are famous for wheat and cattle production. Patagonia, to the south, consists of lakes and rolling hills and is known for its sheep. The nation has a varied landscape, containing such wonders as the Iguazú Falls (1.5 times higher than Niagara Falls), in the north, and the Perito Moreno Glacier of Santa Cruz, to the south.

Argentina's climate is generally temperate, though hot in the subtropical north and cold in the subantarctic region of southern Patagonia. Cool ocean breezes help keep Buenos Aires relatively smog-free. The seasons are opposite those in the Northern Hemisphere: the warmest month is January and the coolest is July.

### History

#### *Indigenous Peoples and Colonization*

Before the Spanish began to colonize Argentina in the 1500s, the area was populated by indigenous groups, some of whom belonged to the Incan Empire. However, most groups were nomadic or autonomous. Colonization began slowly, but in the 1700s the Spanish became well established and indigenous peoples became increasingly marginalized. The British tried to capture Buenos Aires in 1806 but were defeated. The British attempt to conquer the land, coupled with friction with Spain, led to calls for independence. At the time, the colony included Paraguay and Uruguay as well as Argentina.

#### *Independence*

A revolution erupted in 1810 and lasted six years before independence was finally declared. Those favoring a centrist government based in Buenos Aires then fought with those who favored a federal form of government. The actual fighting did not last long, but there was no clear winner and tensions remained. Argentina finally became a unified nation in 1862. (Paraguay and Uruguay had long since become independent.)

Civilian rule was enhanced in 1912, when the country held its first democratic elections (though women would not gain the right to vote until 1947). The government was generally peaceful but weak. After a military coup in 1943, Juan Domingo Perón (a key figure in the coup) emerged as the leader. He was elected president in 1946. He and his wife,

Evita, gained a kind of hero status during that time. Perón ruled until he was overthrown in 1955.

### **Conflicts**

After a series of military and elected governments, Perón returned to power in 1973 but died in 1974, leaving his third wife, Isabel, to rule. She was ousted in 1976 by the military, which then waged a seven-year-long “dirty war” against armed and unarmed civilians in its efforts to reconstruct the Argentine nation. Between 10,000 and 30,000 civilians were killed or “disappeared” with the government's approval.

In 1982, Argentina went to war with Great Britain over las Islas Malvinas (Falkland Islands). The military's defeat in the war led to 1983 elections that ended military rule and brought Raúl Alfonsín to power. Carlos Saúl Menem (of the Partido Justicialista, also known as the Peronist Party) was voted president in 1989, becoming the first democratically elected Argentine president to peacefully replace another president who had been elected. Menem worked toward containing runaway inflation, privatizing state-held enterprises, and stabilizing democratic institutions.

### **Political Transitions**

A new constitution that lifted the ban on reelections and reduced the presidential term to four years enabled Menem to be reelected in 1995. He pursued an agenda of economic reform, but the economy worsened. A quick succession of presidents followed as several left office over the economy. In May 2002, Eduardo Duhalde became the fifth president in two weeks. He was replaced in 2003 by Nestor Kirchner. The economy improved under Kirchner, but the country still faced major challenges, including unemployment, social and political unrest, and the large deficit. In 2005, Argentina's Supreme Court repealed amnesty laws that had protected military officials suspected of crimes during the “dirty war.”

In October 2007, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, Nestor Kirchner's wife, was elected president. Boosted by strong economic growth, she was reelected in 2011 by a wide margin. Though her government remains popular among poor Argentines who benefit from federal subsidies, President Fernández de Kirchner has lost popularity with the urban middle and upper classes, which see her as corrupt and authoritarian.

### **Renewed Falklands Tensions**

As the 30th anniversary of the Falklands War approached, tensions grew between the United Kingdom (UK) and Argentina over las Islas Malvinas, which Argentina still claims and which are potentially a rich source of oil. The UK has rejected an Argentine proposal for talks on the islands' sovereignty, citing the Falkland Islanders' strong desire to maintain association with the UK. Argentina opposed a referendum held in March 2013, in which 99.8 percent of residents of las Islas Malvinas voted for the islands to remain a British Overseas Territory. Argentina has turned away British cruise ships seeking to dock at one of its ports and called on major Argentine companies to boycott British goods. In April 2015, Buenos Aires began legal action against British and U.S. companies involved in oil exploration near the islands.

### **Recent Events and Trends**

• **Debt default:** On 30 July 2014, Argentina defaulted on

about US\$20 billion worth of debt after a U.S. judge ruled that in order to make its current payments, Argentina must also make outstanding payments on debt it defaulted on in 2001. Fearing that paying 2001 debt holders in full would set a dangerous precedent that could harm the economy, Argentina decided to default on its current debt instead, though it had the money for the needed payments. A bill passed by the Argentine congress in September 2014 enables the Argentine government to sidestep the U.S. ruling by making payments to its bondholders locally.

• **Dissolution of intelligence agency:** In February 2015, Argentina's legislature passed a bill introduced by President Fernández de Kirchner that dissolved the country's intelligence agency, replacing it with one accountable to congress. The move follows the death of a prosecutor, Alberto Nisman, who was about to testify against the president and other government officials in a case involving the 1994 bombing of a Jewish center. Nisman had accused the government of covering up Iran's alleged involvement in the bombing in an effort to maintain economic ties with the country. Officials have accused a former Argentine spymaster of being involved in Nisman's death. The cause of death has not been definitively determined: the official version cited suicide but independent test results have suggested murder.

• **Election:** No clear winner emerged in October 2015 elections. Ruling party candidate Daniel Scioli was projected to win but did not secure enough votes to beat his rival, Buenos Aires mayor Mauricio Macri, outright. A second round will be held in November.

## **THE PEOPLE**

### **Population**

The majority of people live in urban areas. The capital city of Buenos Aires is one of the most populated cities in the world, with more than 15 million people in its metropolitan area. As much as 97 percent of the population descends from European immigrants (Italian, Spanish, German, Welsh, English, French, and Russian). Mestizos (people of mixed Spanish and indigenous heritage), indigenous people, and others make up the remaining percentage.

### **Language**

While Spanish is the official language of Argentina, accents vary by region. Perhaps the most distinctive is the *porteño* (Buenos Aires) accent, which has been influenced by Italian and is present throughout central Argentina. The *porteño* pronunciation of *y* and *ll* as “sh” is particularly distinctive. For example, *llamar* (to call) is pronounced more like “shah-MAHR” than the typical “yah-MAHR.”

Residents of Buenos Aires also use slang expressions called *lunfardo*, an informal form of speech derived chiefly from Italian. People throughout Argentina commonly use *vos* rather than *tú* as an informal second-person tense and form of address. Italian, German, French, and English are spoken by members of the older generation and by some of their descendants. Quechua, Guaraní, and Mapuche are languages spoken by indigenous peoples.

## Religion

Roughly 92 percent of the people belong to the Roman Catholic Church. The church exercises great influence over social policy, customs, and celebrations. Most weddings and funerals follow traditional Catholic norms. In spite of this influence, less than 20 percent of Catholics are actively involved with their church, and Argentine society is somewhat more secularized than other Latin American countries.

In 2013, Argentine Jorge Mario Bergoglio became the first pope to come from the Americas. A former Jesuit cardinal, he took on the name Francis. Pope Francis is a source of pride to many Argentines and has garnered worldwide admiration for his concern for the poor and his humble ways, among other things.

Non-Catholic Christian churches are growing. About 2 percent of the people are members of various Protestant churches, another 2 percent are Jewish, and the remaining 4 percent belong to other religious organizations. Religious freedom is guaranteed, and church and state are officially separate.

## General Attitudes

Argentines are proud of their nation, which has risen above difficult times to become a modern and democratic state. The days of the “dirty war” are past, and today political problems are solved through democratic institutions rather than coups. People want to improve their socioeconomic status and provide a better future for their children, but many are worried that because of the economic decline, prosperity is becoming elusive. Young professionals often choose to migrate to countries with more opportunity. There is growing solidarity among many middle-class families, who help each other out in the face of economic hardships.

Financial security, home ownership, and strong personal and family relationships are important to Argentines. Having political or social power or being close to someone who has power is an indicator of social status. Higher education has a long history in Argentina and is also considered a mark of social status and refinement. Urban Argentines tend to be cosmopolitan, progressive, and outgoing. Proud of their educational institutions and European heritage, some consider themselves somewhat superior to their rural countrymen and to residents of other Latin American countries. Rural Argentines are more conservative and see themselves as more hospitable. They tend to view urban people as overly proud.

## Personal Appearance

While dress may differ considerably from region to region, it generally is conservative among older people, who desire to be well dressed in public. In Buenos Aires, European and North American fashions are popular. Argentine women consider European designs to be more fashionable than styles from North America. Emphasis is placed on maintaining a slender physique. Older women usually wear skirts, but the younger generation prefers dressing more casually. Among youth, jeans, T-shirts, and tennis shoes are the norm. Men may also wear informal clothing such as jeans if their jobs

allow and in their leisure time.

During traditional holidays in rural areas, dress often reflects regional culture. For example, the traditional clothing of the *gauchos* (cowboys) of the Pampas includes a wide-brimmed hat, neckerchief, *bombachas* (wide-legged pants), and boots.

## CUSTOMS AND COURTESIES

### Greetings

When greeting formally or for the first time, Argentines shake hands and nod slightly to show respect. Both men and women will greet friends, whether male or female, with a kiss on the cheek and maybe a brief embrace. A person might wave and smile at an acquaintance who is too distant to greet verbally.

*Buenos días* (“Good morning”—*Buen día* in Buenos Aires) or *Buenas tardes* (Good afternoon) are commonly used when people greet friends and acquaintances. In small towns or among neighbors, people often exchange these greetings when passing each other on the street. In big cities, it is considered bad manners not to offer a general greeting when entering an elevator of strangers. When one approaches a stranger or an official for information, it is polite to greet the person before asking questions.

When first introduced or when in formal situations, Argentines customarily address people by title (such as *Señor*, *Señora*, etc.) followed by the surname, if known. Friends and relatives use given names. Argentines may use as nicknames the diminutive forms of words describing physical characteristics. For example, *negrito* (little dark one) and *gordita* (little fat one) are typical terms of endearment.

### Gestures

Argentines often use hand gestures in daily conversation to supplement verbal communication. They may also use gestures to communicate with others from a distance. For example, to order a cup of coffee from a distant server, Argentines hold up an extended thumb and index finger separated slightly, with the other fingers folded in a fist.

During conversation, personal space tends to be limited, and individuals might touch each other or stand close. Passing between conversing individuals is considered rude; if it is necessary, one excuses the action by saying *Con permiso* (With your permission), or just *Permiso*. Direct eye contact may be interpreted as confrontational unless greetings have already been exchanged. Yawning without covering one's mouth is impolite, as is placing one's hands on the hips, which is seen as confrontational. Pointing with the index finger is considered rude. Older men who wear hats remove them in buildings, in elevators, and in the presence of women. Forfeiting seats to the pregnant and the elderly are common practices.

### Visiting

Argentines often visit friends and relatives without prior arrangement. People enjoy having guests in the home and usually offer them refreshments, such as espresso-style coffee. In some regions, friends and relatives commonly share

a ritualistic round of *mate* (MAH-tay), an herbal tea drunk from a communal cup with a *bombilla* (metal straw). Sharing a round of *mate* is a sign of friendship and acceptance.

Invited guests are not expected to arrive on time, as the individual person is considered to be more important than punctuality. Guests may arrive 30 minutes late or later without offending the hosts. Visitors greet each person in the group individually; a group greeting is inappropriate. For formal dinners, guests often bring a small gift, such as flowers, candy, or pastries, to their hosts. In more casual situations, guests bring a bottle of wine, dessert, or—in the case of an *asado* (barbeque)—a side dish to share. Compliments about the home, meal, or hosts' family are appreciated. When leaving, guests again address every person present, using such common parting phrases as *Chau* (Bye) or *Hasta luego* (Until later). The hosts usually open the door for guests when they leave.

### Eating

People typically eat three meals each day. The main meal traditionally is served at midday, but because of work schedules, urban families may be able to gather together only for dinner, which often is served after 9 p.m. Many Argentines also enjoy an afternoon teatime (*merienda*), which usually includes a round of *mate* (a type of herbal tea) or coffee and a pastry or slice of cake. Diners eat in the continental style, with the fork in the left hand and the knife in the right. It is considered polite to keep both hands (but not elbows) above the table, not in the lap. Using a toothpick in public is considered bad manners, as is clearing one's throat at the table. Eating in the street or on public transportation is usually considered inappropriate. Middle-class families used to eat out about once a week, usually on Sunday afternoons, but the worsening economy has made this pattern less common. At restaurants, a tip of 5 to 10 percent is expected.

## LIFESTYLE

### Family

#### Structure

Middle- and upper-class urban families tend to be rather small, averaging two children. Poorer urban families tend to have more children, for which they may receive government subsidies. Rural families are somewhat larger as well, usually with three to four children. Extended families are close, but emphasis is shifting toward the nuclear family. While in the past, multiple generations often lived under the same roof, most nuclear families now have their own residences.

Today, most Argentines use their father's, or sometimes their mother's, surname exclusively. However, in the northern and eastern regions, where influence from Spain is still strong, Argentines have two family names, the father's surname followed by the mother's surname. However, people shorten their full name and are called by their given name followed by their father's surname. For example, Joaquín Martínez Goyena would be called *Joaquín Martínez*.

#### Parents and Children

Children are central to the family and receive a great deal of

attention. Families will sacrifice much to give their children a good education. Children often assist their parents with chores around the house. In poorer families, children share more of the work and from an earlier age. In wealthier families, children may not be expected to perform such duties, as the family often employs household help.

Young people struggle to afford housing on their own, particularly in urban areas, and living with one's parents is the norm. Few people move out of the family home before marriage or graduation from university, and some young couples live with one set of parents until they can afford their own home, usually an apartment. Grown children generally expect to take care of their aging parents. While retirement homes can be found in urban areas, most elderly people live with family members.

#### Gender Roles

The husband is traditionally seen as the head of the household, supporting the family financially and having the final say on most decisions. Men tend to work long hours, often not coming home before 9 p.m. The responsibility of raising children and managing household finances has traditionally fallen on the mother, who in turn exerts great influence on family decisions.

However, in recent generations, gender roles have been changing. Men are taking on more domestic work, and women are playing a larger role in the public arena, with close to half currently employed. Women also hold important posts in business and government (most notably President Christina Fernández de Kirchner). However, the highest positions are still held mostly by men, and the average woman may find it difficult to break into higher levels of employment. Women are not always paid the same as men for equal work.

### Housing

#### Urban

As Argentina industrialized, people congregated in big cities. This urbanization trend continues, though at a slower pace, as people migrate to cities in search of better economic opportunities. The housing market in many urban centers is severely strained as a result of the constant influx of people.

In big cities, most people rent apartments, which are usually small (one to two bedrooms). In poorer areas, multiple families may share an apartment: each family has their own bedroom, while the kitchen and bathrooms are shared. Communities in these areas are often closely knit, with neighbors helping one another, sharing food, and exchanging goods. This communal spirit is less common in wealthier neighborhoods, where security is often emphasized. In the past few years, gated communities have grown in popularity in these neighborhoods. These typically include private sporting facilities such as soccer fields, tennis courts, golf courses, fitness centers, and even polo fields, as well as lakes, chapels, schools, and healthcare facilities.

#### Rural

In rural areas, middle-class residents usually live in stand-alone houses with a large backyard. Most houses have two to three bedrooms, a kitchen, dining room, living room, one or two bathrooms, and sometimes a large porch.

On the outskirts of Buenos Aires and in the Pampas, there are many *estancias*. These are enormous homes built in the 18th and 19th centuries, with numerous rooms, high ceilings, large windows, and huge plots of land. *Estancias* are usually passed from generation to generation. Today, many are used as hotels.

### **Exteriors**

Building materials vary throughout the country, often according to the area's climate. In northern Argentina, homes are often whitewashed to reflect the heat of the sun and cool the inside. In mountainous areas, construction materials tend to be more basic, as local resources may be limited. These homes are often made of adobe or wood and may not have access to running water or electricity. In the far south, where temperatures are cooler, houses are built to retain heat and are often inspired by Swiss and German designs, reflecting the presence of European immigrants in these areas. The style of apartments varies according to the socioeconomic level and the time period in which the apartment was built. New apartments in urban centers are often constructed in a modern style, incorporating materials and design elements such as concrete and metal.

Almost all houses are surrounded by fences or brick walls, and windows are protected by iron bars, which become part of the house's style and decoration. Backyards are generally found only in suburban and rural areas.

### **Home Life**

A modern house or apartment consists of a kitchen, dining room, living room, two or more bedrooms, and a bathroom. Large family gatherings usually occur in the living or dining rooms. The kitchen is an important space not only for the preparation of food but also for the exchange of daily news. Conversation and refreshments may also take place in the living room. In homes without electricity, fireplaces provide heat and often serve as the gathering point for the family, who congregates at the hearth to stay warm. Wealthy Argentines employ housekeepers and cooks, who sometimes live with the families. In middle-class families with employed mothers, someone may be hired to help with the cooking and cleaning or just the cleaning.

### **Home Ownership**

Home ownership is important to the average Argentine. In big cities, especially Buenos Aires, the average family must save up for many years in order to buy a house or apartment. Mortgages are generally only available to those earning significantly more than the average salary. A weak economy coupled with rising property costs has challenged many Argentines' ability to afford to purchase a home and, in other cases, has made it difficult for current home owners to pay their mortgages.

## **Dating and Marriage**

### **Dating and Courtship**

Group activities between boys and girls usually begin at about 15, the age at which girls celebrate their most important birthday (*cumpleaños de quince*), which is seen as the end of their childhood. A favorite activity of young couples is dancing. Young people also play sports, dine out, and go to movies.

Serious relationships often develop slowly over several years; couples who go to university usually postpone marriage until their mid-twenties or thirties, waiting until after they have graduated and have achieved a degree of stability in their careers. Others marry earlier. Formal engagements are increasingly rare. It is now more common for a couple to simply decide to marry and start making plans.

### **Marriage in Society**

Though marriage is still considered the norm in the more conservative northern and southern provinces, cohabitation before or instead of marriage is more common in the large urban centers of the central provinces, where the negative stigma once attached to the practice has disappeared.

Due to the influence of the Catholic Church, divorce was illegal until 1987. It is now legal and on the rise, though rates are still relatively low. Traditionally, society looked unfavorably upon divorce, particularly divorced women. Today, there is a more relaxed view toward divorce and remarriage, more so in urban areas than in rural areas. In 2010, Argentina became the first Latin American country to legalize same-sex marriage, granting gay couples the same rights as heterosexual couples.

### **Weddings**

The wedding is usually paid for jointly by the couple's families and the couple themselves. A growing number of couples pay for the entire wedding themselves. Families and couples who cannot afford a wedding on their own may include a note in their invitations alerting guests that they must pay a certain fee to attend. Guests then give this amount in advance to the couple's parents.

Weddings are often elaborate, and most include three events: a civil ceremony (which is required for a marriage to be legally valid), a church wedding, and a large reception at a *salon de events* (reception hall). Most church weddings follow Roman Catholic traditions. The bride is accompanied by her father (or another close relative) in the procession to the altar, where the groom is waiting. The priest blesses the couple and pronounces them married. As she leaves the church, the bride usually throws her bouquet into a group of single women who have gathered.

The lavishness of the reception depends on what the families can afford. Most receptions start with a formal dinner. Often only close friends and family will be invited to this, with a wider group joining in later. The bride and groom open the dance floor with their first dance, usually a waltz, followed by the bride dancing with her father. Then the guests join in the dancing and the party gets underway, often lasting late into the night.

Although the majority of weddings take place in a church, a growing number of couples who do not want or cannot afford an elaborate or religious wedding opt for a civil ceremony only. Close friends and family members may accompany the couple to the courthouse for the marriage. The couple is married by a judge and may choose to exchange rings as part of the ceremony. Afterward, a small gathering is usually held at the home of the bride's or groom's family.

## **Life Cycle**

### **Birth**

Births are often celebrated with an informal meal with relatives and friends. Years ago, such celebrations were often reserved for male children, but now all births are celebrated in this way. In recent years, new and unconventional names have been growing in popularity. However, the Spanish equivalents of Biblical names (such as Maria or Juan) are still the most popular names, and it is very common to name children after parents or grandparents.

Most Argentines are nominally Catholic but the majority do not practice their religion. Nevertheless, they usually baptize their children a few months after their birth and name uncles, aunts, or close friends as godparents. Godparents are expected to help raise the child, often contributing financially to their upbringing, and look after the child if the parents die.

### **Milestones**

Traditionally, Argentines were considered adults at age 21. However, in 2010, Argentine law changed the age of legal adulthood from 21 to 18. Today, most people view the 18th birthday as the coming of age. It is usually celebrated with a party with friends and family members.

Many girls celebrate their 15th birthday with a special dance or party, called the *fiesta de quince*. Because of the expense involved in such a party, not all families are able to afford one, or some might ask guests to contribute to the celebration in advance. Some parents give their daughters the choice between such a party and a trip abroad. After her 15th birthday, a girl is generally given more freedom to go to dances and parties, wear makeup, and date.

Graduation from high school is another important milestone. Groups of young people often celebrate their graduation by taking a trip to Bariloche, a city in Patagonia renowned for its skiing. The trip is often been for with monthly installments over the two years prior, and students often coordinate fundraising events or take on part-time jobs in order to save for the trip.

### **Death**

The rituals performed on death depend a good deal on family traditions. Usually, the deceased are taken to funeral parlors, where they spend the night in a casket that relatives and friends can visit as part of a *velatorio* (wake). However, today it is more common for people to go home at night and return in the morning. The funeral is held at the funeral parlor. In rural areas, it is still typical for the funeral to include a Mass, during which prayers are said for the soul of the deceased and mourners eulogize the deceased, paying tribute to his or her life and achievements. From the mortuary room to the cemetery, the casket is carried in a dark-colored *coche fúnebre* (hearse) and followed by a caravan of cars. A growing numbers of Argentines are choosing cremation in response to the rising costs of burial. On the anniversary of a person's death, friends and family often visit the gravesite and say prayers.

### **Diet**

Italian food, especially pasta, is the primary cuisine of most Argentines. French food is also widely available. Because the country is a major beef producer, domestic prices have traditionally been low enough for most people to eat beef every day. However, inflation and a growing grain export

market that has cut into production have caused prices to rise in recent years. This, combined with increased interest in a more varied diet, has motivated some Argentines to cut back on beef, causing the country to fall from its long-held place as the world's top beef consumer. Even so, the meat remains culturally important and a staple for many. Construction companies, for example, are known to provide workers access to portable grills for use at lunchtime, and a favorite way to entertain is still the weekend *asado* (barbecue).

Another common food is *empanadas* (meat or vegetable turnovers). Lamb, in addition to beef, is common fare in Patagonia. The average diet also includes chicken and a wide variety of fruits and vegetables. In northern provinces, a preferred winter stew is *locro* (made of meat, corn, and potatoes). In the summer, particularly in the north, people drink *tereré*, a cold version of *mate* (an herbal tea) mixed with lemonade. Local wines and soft drinks are also popular. Ice cream is a year-round favorite, and gelato shops that offer many flavors are especially common thanks to Italian influence in Argentina.

## **Recreation**

### **Sports**

*Fútbol* (soccer) is an important aspect of daily life for many Argentines, with most people having an allegiance to one of the country's national teams. Going to see a match in the Bombonera (the major stadium in Buenos Aires) or at the local *cancha* (playing field) is a major social event in the lives of most Argentines. Loyalty to a team is expressed passionately, particularly during matches. Sometimes violence even breaks out after a tense game between a city's opposing teams. Conversations between friends often center on the results of matches or the performance of favorite team members. A typical weekend *asado* (barbecue) often includes a game of *fútbol*.

Other popular sports include basketball, volleyball, and rugby. Horse racing, field hockey, tennis, and polo are enjoyed by the upper class. *El pato* (the duck) is a national sport in which players on horseback compete to toss a six-handled ball into a high basket. The game originated in Las Pampas, where it was initially a violent sport played with a leather-stuffed duck instead of a ball. The game is still popular today, though only among the wealthy. National and regional championships are held throughout the country.

### **Leisure**

In their leisure time, Argentines enjoy watching television, reading, playing cards, relaxing with friends, and going to movies and plays. Older men often play chess or *bochas* (lawn bowling) in public squares. Social networking sites are extremely popular.

Sunday is a day for outings with family and friends. Groups of people gather at local parks for an *asado*, during which people drink *mate* (herbal tea) and socialize. Many Argentines enjoy singing, whether at a karaoke bar or around the home. Young people usually enjoy popular contemporary songs, while older people prefer traditional songs. In urban areas, people gather at public parks or private sports clubs. In the outskirts of cities and in rural areas, trade unions are an important part of the social life of their members, hosting

social activities like dances, birthday celebrations, and dinners. In rural areas, neighborhoods often organize communal gatherings, which feature dancing, singing, and barbecuing.

#### **Vacation**

Most people take a yearly vacation. Destinations within Argentina are popular. Airfare that can be paid in monthly instalments make neighboring countries like Uruguay and Brazil common vacation spots as well, especially when currency exchange rates are favorable.

#### **The Arts**

European culture has strongly influenced Argentine art and music, particularly symphonic music and operas. Buenos Aires is home to a fine opera house (the Colón). Native Argentine influence is evident in folk arts, including horn-carving, silver work, leather work, ceramics, and weaving. The National Foundation for the Arts is leading a movement to preserve these crafts.

The tango (the music and the dance) originated in Argentina. For years it has been more popular outside of Argentina than among Argentines, who prefer dancing and listening to salsa and other types of music from the United States, Argentina, or Central America. However, the tango is enjoying a revival among some young adults, especially in Buenos Aires. The guitar, the violin, and the *bandoneón* (similar to an accordion) accompany the dancers. Younger generations often prefer Caribbean dances, such as salsa and *cumbia*. Many older, more traditional Argentines view these dances as less refined than the tango.

Argentina has a long literary culture, with writers like Julio Cortázar and Jorge Luis Borges gaining international prominence. Representing bravery, freedom, and self-sufficiency, the *gaucho* (cowboy) is an important Argentine symbol and a frequent subject in painting and literature. *El gaucho Martín Fierro* (1872), the national epic poem, describes *gaucho* life. *Gaucho* themes were also incorporated into classical music by composers in the early 20th century.

#### **Holidays**

Public holidays include New Year's Day (1 Jan.); *Día de las Malvinas* (2 Apr.); Easter; Labor Day (1 May); Anniversary of the May Revolution (25 May); Flag Day (20 June); Independence Day (9 July); *Día de San Martín*, for José Francisco de San Martín, who is known as "the liberator" of Peru, Chile, and Argentina and who defeated the Spanish in 1812 (17 Aug.); Day of Respect for Cultural Diversity (12 Oct.); and Christmas (25 Dec.). In recent years, some Argentines have begun to celebrate Halloween, with children going from door to door trick-or-treating for candy.

#### **National Holidays**

Argentines celebrate religious holidays more festively than national holidays, using the latter mostly for leisure time or to do household repairs. *Día de las Malvinas* commemorates Argentina's 1982 invasion of the Falkland Islands, called las Islas Malvinas in Argentina. Flag Day commemorates the role of General Belgrano in the struggle for independence. In major cities, this day is celebrated with patriotic activities

such as flying the Argentine flag and singing the national anthem. In 2010, the name of the holiday previously called Columbus Day was changed to Day of Respect for Cultural Diversity in acknowledgement of the destruction that colonization caused to native people. It is commemorated primarily by primary school children who wear traditional clothes and are taught about how indigenous people were affected by colonization.

#### **Christian Holidays**

While Christian holidays are widely observed, members of the younger generation do not attach the same religious significance to these occasions as do older Argentines. Easter is an important Christian holiday, and celebrations are spread over two weeks. Holy Week (*Semana Santa*) is the week leading up to Easter and is marked with solemn rituals associated with the final moments of Jesus's life, which may take the form of a procession through city streets or a pilgrimage to such places as Luján (an important Christian site). Easter Sunday is celebrated with a special Mass followed by a lunch (usually pasta or an *asado*, or barbecue) with family and friends. Common traditions include exchanging chocolate eggs, playing cards, drinking *mate* (herbal tea), and eating *rosca de Pascua* (a sweet braided bread containing fruit and an unbroken egg). Many middle-class families use time off of work and school during Easter week to take trips to nearby vacation spots.

#### **Christmas and New Year's**

Christmas is often celebrated with large family gatherings. On Christmas Eve (*Nochebuena*), the extended family gathers for dinner, music, and often dancing. Candy is served just before midnight, when fireworks displays begin. Gifts from *Papá Noel* (Father Christmas) are opened on Christmas Eve, while all other gifts are exchanged on Christmas Day. After opening gifts and making a midnight toast, young people usually go out dancing with friends. After the main meal on Christmas Day (lunch or dinner, depending on the family), people go out to visit friends and more distant relatives.

In some rural areas in northern Argentina, large comic effigies portraying cartoon or historical characters are exhibited and sometimes burned, representing a cleansing or purification in preparation for the New Year celebrations the following week. Light-colored clothing is often given as gifts because it is believed to bring good luck to the recipient. On New Year's Eve, people usually celebrate with small gatherings of family and friends. Many people watch televised variety shows that count down to the New Year.

## **SOCIETY**

#### **Government Structure**

The Argentine Republic has 23 provinces and 1 autonomous city (Buenos Aires). The executive branch consists of a president, vice president, and cabinet. The president is both head of state and head of government. The president and the vice president serve four-year terms and cannot serve more than two consecutive terms. The legislature, the National Congress, has two houses: a 72-seat Senate (three for each

province and autonomous city) and a 257-seat Chamber of Deputies. Members of the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies are directly elected to six- and four-year terms, respectively. Argentina has one of the highest levels of female representation in congress because at least one-third of both houses must be women. Members of the independent Supreme Court are appointed by the president. According to a law passed in May 2013, members of the board that selects federal judges are elected.

### **Political Landscape**

Politics in Argentina are dominated by the Partido Justicialista (PJ), also known as the Peronist Party, and its factions, though the party has become deeply fractured in recent elections. During elections, parties usually form coalitions to help them succeed at the polls. The military has historically played a large role in Argentine politics, though now it is completely subject to civilian control. Because of the traditional power of the PJ, organized labor has also had a strong voice in politics.

### **Government and the People**

Argentines can vote when they turn 16 and are legally required to do so beginning at age 18. Despite mandatory voting, voter turnout has rarely topped 80 percent in recent years. The constitution provides for free expression, though recently the government has sought to limit it, especially press freedoms. Freedom of religion, however, is constitutionally guaranteed and well respected, as are rights to freely assemble and associate. Corruption remains a problem in the judiciary, though the problem is declining as long-serving judges are slowly replaced. The government generally ignores the rights and needs of indigenous peoples. The banging of pots and pans is a traditional form of protest, called *cacerolazo*; however, sometimes protestors now make noise by clapping their hands instead.

### **Economy**

Agriculture has always been the mainstay of the Argentine economy, although it employs a decreasing percentage of the population. Argentina is famous for its livestock and is one of the world's largest exporters of beef, hides, and wool. The country also exports large amounts of wheat, corn, and flaxseed, as well as soybean and cotton. Important industries include food processing, meat packing, motor vehicles, consumer goods, textiles, chemicals, printing, and metallurgy.

Former president Carlos Menem's reforms stimulated economic growth throughout the 1990s. Inflation decreased from 3,000 percent to less than 1 percent, and foreign investment increased. However, an economic recession began in tandem with the global emerging markets crisis in 1998 and intensified in 1999, after Brazil, Argentina's largest trading partner, dramatically devalued its currency. In 2002, the government defaulted on its loans; the currency board (in which the *peso* was pegged to the U.S. dollar) collapsed, and the *peso* rapidly devalued. Unemployment skyrocketed, and more than half the population slipped into poverty. The economy then experienced a period of recovery and strong growth. The year 2005 saw the repayment of International Monetary Fund (IMF) debts ahead of schedule. However, inflation remained a problem.

The global economic recession of 2008 hurt Argentina, and with the exception of a strong but brief period of recovery in 2010, economic growth has been slow since. Economic struggles include a weak currency (the Argentine *peso*, or ARS) and inflation rates that are among the world's highest. Increased government intervention in the form of tighter trade restrictions, price freezes, and currency devaluation has not alleviated these problems. Nor has the 2012 government seizure of the formerly privately owned oil company YFP proved to be the boon to the economy that was hoped for. The few Argentines who can afford to save try to do so in dollars, which are expensive to purchase. The government has been censured in the past by the IMF for not providing accurate economic statistics.

### **Transportation and Communications**

Transportation and communications systems are well developed. Argentines have access to private cars, but taxis, subways, buses, and trains generally are the favored form of intra-city transportation. Following a train crash in 2012 that killed 51 people, auditors identified systemic problems with the rail system, which was privatized in 1991 and has suffered from mismanagement and disrepair. Nevertheless, trains remain a common form of transportation, especially for those traveling into the capital from suburbs for work. The subway system (*subte*) in Buenos Aires is efficient and inexpensive. A small portion of the population rides motorcycles for transportation, but bicycles are reserved for recreation. Airlines link major cities in Argentina and neighboring countries. Buenos Aires is the most important seaport.

Cellular phones are used throughout the country, and the use of landlines is declining. Most people have high-speed internet connections and personal computers. Internet access happens both at home and on mobile devices. Postal service is extensive but not always reliable. Newspapers are widely available and often represent a defined ideological perspective.

### **Education**

#### **Structure**

School is compulsory from ages five through seventeen. In most areas, children are required to attend one year of kindergarten followed by seven years of primary school and five years of secondary school (six if it is a technical school).

#### **Access**

All levels of public education are free. In many cases, books and supplies are also paid for by the government, and currently a federal plan provides every child in public school with a personal computer. Private schools do not always provide better-quality education to students, but they do provide a more steady one, as public schools are subject to closure many days per year due to teachers striking for higher wages. Most middle-class Argentines are educated in state-subsidized Catholic schools or schools subsidized by foreign governments such as Italy and Spain. Although these schools are subsidized, students still must pay tuition.

Virtually all children complete primary school, and most eligible students continue on to secondary school. Attendance rates for indigenous children and those in rural areas are often



lower than the average. Due to economic difficulties, not all children are able to complete their secondary education, and enforcement of their attendance is not always possible, especially in remote areas. Many public schools lack the funds, supplies, and teachers necessary to provide a quality education.

### School Life

Although some schools incorporate computers and other technology into their teaching, many public schools can only offer a more traditional textbook-focused approach. Secondary schooling emphasizes analytical skills, while primary schooling tends to be more textbook oriented. Homework may take a few hours per day and gradually increases as the student progresses in school. Teachers often have a close relationship with their students and sometimes socialize with them outside of class. In rural areas, students usually call their teachers by their official title (*profesor/a*, *señor/a*) followed by their surname. Urban areas tend to be more casual, with students using the shortened versions of these titles (*profe*, *seño*) followed by their first name or, in some high schools, using the first name alone.

### Higher Education

Argentines may seek higher education at national and private universities, as well as at teacher-training colleges, vocational schools, and other institutions. Major cities have public and private universities. Public universities do not charge tuition and tend to be overcrowded, though a vigorous curriculum means that only the most dedicated students continue. Wealthy Argentines often prefer to study at universities in the United States, Australia, or the United Kingdom.

### Health

Argentines enjoy relatively good health and have access to both public and private healthcare facilities. Public hospitals provide care for citizens free of charge and provide quality service in Argentina's major cities. Public hospitals also carry out free and compulsory vaccination campaigns. However, many Argentines consider the private system to be superior, although it is more costly. Private health care is available for those who allocate a portion of their salaries to a private health fund, though many cannot afford to do so and the public system is overcrowded as a result. Care is less reliable and less available in rural areas. Trade unions often provide health services for their members. Access to safe water and sanitation is still lacking in some rural areas and in suburban shantytowns. Middle-class Argentines suffer most from lifestyle-related diseases, so exercise and healthy eating are becoming more popular.

## AT A GLANCE

### Contact Information

Embassy of Argentina, 1600 New Hampshire Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20009; phone (202) 238-6400; web site [www.embassyofargentina.us](http://www.embassyofargentina.us). Ministry of Tourism, phone (212) 603-0443, web site [www.turismo.gov.ar/eng/menu.htm](http://www.turismo.gov.ar/eng/menu.htm).

### Country and Development Data

Capital	Buenos Aires
Population	43,431,886 (rank=32)
Area (sq. mi.)	1,073,518 (rank=8)
Area (sq. km.)	2,780,400
Human Development Index	49 of 187 countries
Gender Inequality Index	74 of 152 countries
GDP (PPP) per capita	\$22,100
Adult Literacy	98% (male); 98% (female)
Infant Mortality	9.96 per 1,000 births
Life Expectancy	73 (male); 80 (female)
Currency	Argentine peso

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ProQuest  
789 East Eisenhower Parkway  
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