

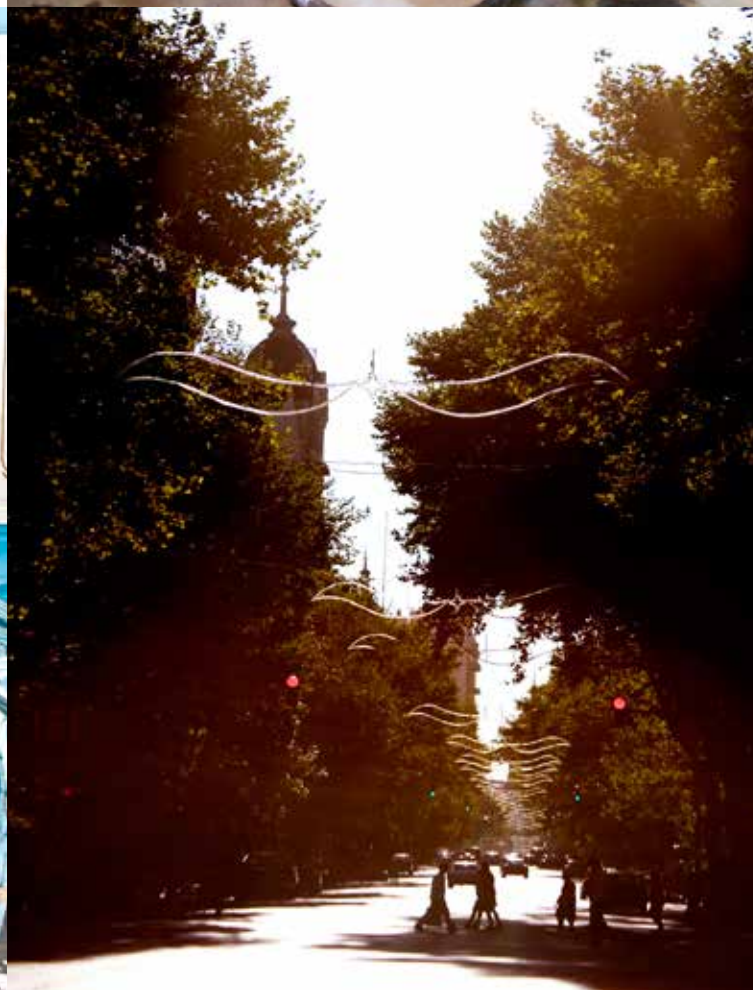
Latin SoHo

Buenos Aires is as hip as it is aristocratic, if you consider the many bohemian *barrios*, trendy eateries and lovely green parks framed by grand avenues. Join us on a trip to rediscover Argentina's capital.

Text Margriet Marbus
Photography Mirjam Bleeker



Buenos Aires is the happening hotspot of South America



Previous pages (from left to right):
Buenos Aires is a very green city, as seen here in the chic Recoleta neighbourhood; one of the trendy eateries in Palermo.

Opposite page (clockwise from top right):
A barbershop in Palermo Viejo; a long *avenida* in Recoleta; one of the many colourful little restaurants in Palermo.

Destination Buenos Aires

‘The happening hotspot of South America,’ that would really be a good way to describe Buenos Aires. The folkloristic image of pampas, cattle, steaks and tango deserves a make-over, or at least an add-on, because it ignores the city’s lounge clubs, boutique hotels, street terraces, fine-dining restaurants, small designer-run concept stores, and skate and bike shops. And what about the fashionable patrons that complete the picture? But where to start to discover this new vibe? Ask any Argentinian and they’ll answer you with a smile and a straight forward reply: “Palermo is the place to be.” If you want to experience the Paris of the South, this one-word instruction for the taxi driver is all you need. The largest city district of Buenos Aires has it all. And more.

Spring is in the air

“*Primavera!* Spring is here. Flowers, ma’am? A house plant, perhaps?”

Right on the corner of Calle Honduras and Avenida Juan B. Justo, the busy road that slices Palermo in two, Dolores Maria Ortiz runs her business out of a street cart filled with colours and greenery. A brightly hued blanket displays cacti, small palm trees, the odd tulip and loads of pink and red geraniums, so typical of Buenos Aires. From her left, the Calle Honduras extends for many kilometres into the division called Palermo Hollywood. The right side of the road leads to Palermo SoHo. Follow it, and you end up at the Plaza Serrano, where artists and souvenir vendors sell their goods, and many restaurants with outdoor terraces await you.

“Tea, señora? *Mate?*”

This waiter works in a charming place that has antique metal chairs. On his arm, an anarchist symbol is tattooed, and one of his eyebrows is pierced. A typical Palermo youngster. He explains what *mate* (you have to pronounce it as ‘MahTAY’) is.

“A typical Argentinian beverage, a kind of tea drunk from a cup with a thick, silver straw, known as a *bomba*. You’ll have to try it at least once. It’s our national drink.”

Mate, derived from the leaves and buds

of the eponymous plant, turns out to be a bitter and strong brew, to be enjoyed while it’s hot.

The waiter grins. “It is somewhat of an acquired taste.”

Turning left towards Avenida Santa Fe, brings you to the Calle Jorge Luis Borges, a shopping street with lots of small boutiques. Some international brands, like Diesel and Levi’s, are there, but most of the products are Argentinian-made. Ponchos, jeans, T-shirts; all very affordable. Buenos Aires is not an expensive place. Dinner will set you back half of what you pay in Europe. Gradually, more and more Argentinians are venturing out on this gorgeous day. The picturesque streets lined with old houses in Palermo Viejo are becoming crowded. July and August were foggy and cold but that’s all forgotten, now that the sun is shining. Spring has sprung, finally.

“People here like to go out and promenade,” says Julio de la Rosa, a retired lawyer.

Hiding behind his newspaper *La Nación* at a branch of the very popular coffee giant Cafe Martinez on Avenida Santa Fe, the man enjoys a coffee and a slice of lemon meringue pie. Meringue is Argentina’s official pastry, De la Rosa points out. But today, there’s much more to enjoy.

“*Primavera*,” he sighs happily. Spring.

He politely nods at two women, who have bared their arms to the sun’s rays. They smile.

“*Buenos dias, señor*. And stop looking, or all the beauty will come off!”

The old gentleman returns their smile and spears another piece of his pie.

“Haha! Happy people! Everyone out and about! Off to the park! Fresh air!”

He wipes the crumbs from his moustache, folds his newspaper and gets up.

“*Vamos!*”

Paris, SoHo and Hollywood

Just as Parisians are raring to go out onto the Champs Elysées in April, the residents of the Argentinian capital love to go outside in September. Their promenades of choice are located in up-and-coming Palermo, which has such a lot to offer. Spread out over 17 square kilometres, Palermo is not an easy district to be explored on foot. Once you have reached

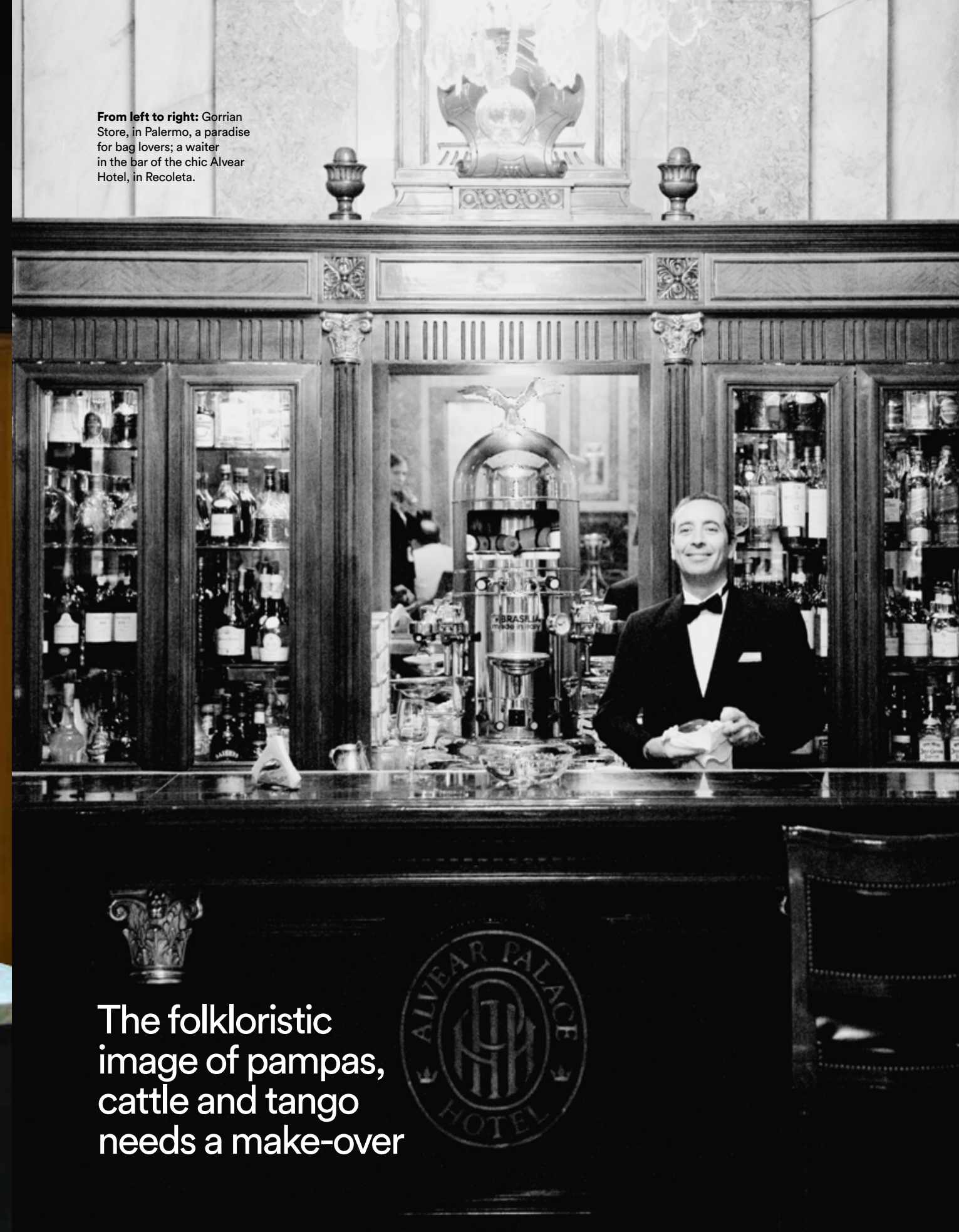
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Destination Buenos Aires

Yo me uno
a la lucha
por la
Liberación
del gorrión
de barrio.



From left to right: Gorrian Store, in Palermo, a paradise for bag lovers; a waiter in the bar of the chic Alvear Hotel, in Recoleta.



The folkloristic
image of pampas,
cattle and tango
needs a make-over

To do

Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes
Home to a massive international art collection, from the first Latin American artists to Kandinsky, Picasso and Van Gogh.
mnba.gob.ar
Avenida del Libertador 1473

The parks of Palermo
Visit the green side of Buenos Aires and discover fountains, statues and playgrounds beneath a canopy of green.

Jardín Japonés
The Japanese Gardens of Palermo are an exceptional place. Best time to visit: from September to November, when spring blossoms do their magic.

To shop

Plaza Serrano
On the corner of Serrano with Calle Jorge Luis Borges and Hunduras. Here, you'll find lots of specialised shops and places to find gadgets. The square hosts a colourful market as well.

The streets of Palermo Hollywood
Explore the area's specialty shops and hidden fine-dining venues.

To stay

Hotel Clásico
Old parquet floors, nice vintage wooden furniture, brass lamps – this hotel certainly delivers on its promise.
hotelclasico.com
Calle Costa Rica 5480

The Four Seasons
The charm of a Paris attic apartment combined with the delightful opulence you expect from the Four Seasons.
fourseasons.com/buenosaires
Posadas 1086/88

To eat

Möoi
The popular restaurant of Hotel Clásico is the hotspot of Palermo Hollywood and is frequented by media and fashion professionals. Enjoy the mediterranean menu and tasty vegetarian dishes.
mooirestaurant.com
Calle Costa Rica 5468

De Olivas i Lustres
Go to this wildly decorated place to enjoy top quality tapas or a wonderful ceviche.
Gorriti 3972

Elena
The Chesterfields in the Victorian industrial decor are often taken up by celebrities on Friday nights. The hipster serving staff will bring you incredible food and wines, such as bresaola made from kobe beef.
elenaponyline.com
Posadas 1086/88

To drink

Isabel
Sophisticated place with an entrance fee. Lively, uptown crowd, great cocktails and wines.
Uriarte 1664

Pony Line
Have a beer or a glass of wine with the Argentinian polo fans on a Friday night.
elenaponyline.com
Posadas 1086/88

Frank's
Jazzy, characteristic bar, where patrons cradle their whisky until the early hours. A good place to meet the insiders and diehards of Buenos Aires' nightlife.
Arévalo 1445

Avenida Santa Fe, you've covered quite a distance, characterised by great sightseeing. Palermo resembles the New York version of SoHo, where renovated town houses, unique shops, restaurants and bars also abound. Regardless of the throngs of young professionals who flock here, the place still feels more down to earth than the rest of the majestic capital, with its bronze statues.

What lies at the root of this easy-going vibe is probably the architecture. Compared to a district like Recoleta, there are fewer high-rises in Palermo and more classic homes, interspersed with modern houses and a few pretty Art Deco buildings. Many dwellings have been painted in bright colours and are spruced up with the ubiquitous geraniums.

Nobody knows exactly where the name of this 19th-century district originated. According to some, it was named after an Italian immigrant, Juan Domingo Palermo, who owned land in the area. Others maintain it was named in honour of Saint Benedict of Palermo, the patron saint of an ancient abby on Sicily. Other than that, there seems to be no connection to the Sicilian Palermo.

The one thing everyone does agree on, however, is that Palermo is booming, and everyone who's anyone in Buenos Aires lives there. Property prices have shot up in the city's largest *barrio*, which borders Belgrano to the north, and Almagro and the super classy Recoleta to the south.

Palermo consists of several smaller neighbourhoods, each with their own character. Of these, Palermo Chico, the quarter where a large number of embassies occupy stately houses, is the most exclusive. This part of Palermo lies adjacent to the city parks and gardens that define the east side. Palermo Viejo is the nostalgic centre, with charming old streets and houses. Media enterprises have taken up residence in Palermo Hollywood, hence the name. Well-heeled professionals from the fashion industry saunter down its fancy streets. Palermo SoHo tends to attract the *gentes bohemio*, the alternative crowd. Finally, there's Palermo Botanico, another green part of town adjoining the Botanical Gardens. >



Palermo feels more down to earth than the rest of the majestic capital

“Within a decade,
everyone from Europe
will be visiting us,
instead of the other
way around”



Destination Buenos Aires

Relaxing in a green space

In between Avenida Santa Fe – where, if you recall, only a few paragraphs back Julio de la Rosa got up and left – and the Río de La Plata lies a green belt of city parks, otherwise known as the Bosques de Palermo. These woods are densely set with giant, awe-inspiring trees. The Parque Tres de Febrero is the largest one. In it, you’ll find bicycle lanes and running tracks, playgrounds and ponds, all open to the general public. It was named after the deposition of dictator Juan Manuel de Rosas on 3 February, 1852, who owned much of the land between Palermo and the Río de la Plata after forcefully having taken it from its original inhabitants. The state confiscated the land and turned it into a relaxation zone for its residents. Later, the botanical gardens, the zoo, the Plaza Italia and rose garden El Rosedal were developed, all within or on edge of this gigantic green belt.

If you happen to appreciate bronze statues, this is the perfect place to relax for you. Most of the busts featured in the park are over a century old. Around the 1900s, Argentina enjoyed tremendous wealth, largely due to its meat exports. The government responded graciously by adorning the city with countless precious bronzes. Famous poets and writers such as Jorge Luis Borges, William Shakespeare and Luigi Pirandello are standing there, and certainly won’t mind a selfie or two.

Evita is here

Leading away from the Parque Tres de Febrero in an easterly direction, Avenida del Libertador brings you to the must-see Recoleta district. Spectacular monuments punctuate the walk, such as the Monumento a España. A tribute to Spain, it symbolises the friendship between the two nations. When you reach Recoleta, you’ll suddenly find yourself surrounded by classic French-style architecture. Creamy seven-floor apartment buildings that could easily be situated in Paris light up the streets. This is uptown Buenos Aires, where fur-clad ladies meet in elegant coffee houses to hear the latest about their friends and neighbours.

Noteworthy is the Cementerio de la Recoleta. This is where Argentina’s most famous first lady, Eva Perón, is buried. Although tourists are in

the majority, many Argentinians have also made the pilgrimage. Affectionately called ‘Evita’, she’s as popular as ever, and the flower vendors know it.

“*Flores for our Evita? Por favor, señora, you can’t visit Evita without flowers!*”

There’s a tourist market in the park as well. It offers a wide variety of goods, but is more expensive than the ones in Palermo. Don’t leave without a snack, though. Caramel apples, chocolate strawberries; the Argentinians like to mix sweet and healthy. It’s not exactly local cuisine, but there doesn’t seem to be much of that going around in the first place. There’s a simple explanation for that. After the Spanish invasion and losing battle after battle, many of the indigenous people moved west and north. Which explains why so many of the locals have European features, live in European-inspired houses and eat dishes that lack the typical South American cultural influences.

The great late lunch

Buenos Aires’ shadowy lanes and avenues with old trees are very conducive to a good long walk. But walking around leaves a person hungry. Fortunately, lunch is the most important meal in this part of the world. People start their day early, around 7.30 a.m., so by 2 p.m., lunch on an outdoor terrace is most appealing. On a pretty spring day, it feels especially idyllic, so back to the Palermo patios it is. In a cab this time, the perfect alternative to walking, because you still get to see a lot of the city at a fare that is reasonable. Many of the terraces in Palermo Hollywood have been set up in anticipation. Chairs dusted, tables arranged just so. A waiter from an Italian restaurant in the Calle Guatamala is writing down today’s menu on an outdoor sign.

Within minutes, the terrace is occupied to the last chair. Where night time in Buenos Aires is the right moment for salads, soups, bruschetta and other light fare, lunch mostly features pasta, pizza, paella and risotto. And giant dishes of potatoes au gratin with stewed meat and steaks, no surprise in a country known for its top-notch beef. Although, glancing around, you’d have to conclude the tradition of consuming large quantities of meat may have run its course. >

Previous page (clockwise from top left):

Bartola Corner in Palermo Viejo serves great lunch; two boys look out with curiosity from one of the many old trucks that drive around Buenos Aires; La Avenida de Mayo was built between 1885 en 1894 and leads to Buenos Aires’ main square, Plaza de Mayo.

Opposite page (clockwise from top right):

Waiters in the popular café La Biela (Recoleta district); restaurant Nueva Casa Freud & Fahler in Palermo; a colourful house in the old neighbourhood La Boca.



- ## The right stuff

A waiter lists some of the vegetarian dishes. Hotel Clásico is one of the most popular spots in Palermo Hollywood. All rooms are adorned with antique chandeliers and vintage furniture. Outside, there are wrought-iron balconies with – you guessed it – geraniums. Passers-by take pictures of a blonde model.

Seven days offered no way near enough time to truly see the entire city. Many streets, clubs, restaurants and studios of Argentina's newest designers were left undiscovered. Weeks of additional exploring are in order. On the upside, a week is more than enough to conclude that Buenos Aires is, indeed, much more than tango and steaks. ■

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