

Argentina



FROM THE STREETS OF BUENOS AIRES TO THE PEAKS OF PATAGONIA, THIS VAST COUNTRY OFFERS ALMOST EVERY TYPE OF EXPERIENCE, WHETHER YOU WANT TO HIKE IN A NATIONAL PARK, SAMPLE LOCAL WINE, GO WHALE-WATCHING OR STAY ON A RANCH

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IMAGES: RENATO GRANIERI/AWL IMAGES



NATURAL WONDERS

Force of life

Visitors to Iguazú Falls often overlook the wild Misiones region surrounding it — but one lodge working with the area's Indigenous Guarani people is hoping to change that. Words: Sarah Marshall

Thumping with a million mini heartbeats, the jungle never sleeps. Insects hum, monkeys squeal and birds trill to create a rapturous symphony. But in the humid equatorial rainforests, almost everyone needs a rest by midday.

Drifting silently along the terracotta waters of the Yacu-I River, I allow the current to carry me downstream. It's one of hundreds of rivers, streams and creeks eventually making their way to the mighty Iguazú Falls, just over 60 miles away from where I'm kayaking. In 2022, almost three million people visited the falls — a UNESCO World Heritage site that straddles a border with Brazil at the northeastern tip of Argentina and is divided between both countries. Many tourists fly in as part of a broader South America circuit and stay here for only a few days, missing out on the beauty of the Misiones province that lies beyond it on the Argentinian side.

Brazil's unfathomably vast forests cover almost 60% of the country, but in Misiones — an area roughly the size of Belgium — only around 6% of the original Atlantic rainforest that once covered the region remains. Awasi, which operates a 14-villa lodge on the edge of Iguazú National Park, believes one of the best ways to protect that precious pocket of biodiversity is by showing people what's there. When the lodge opened in 2017, it made an agreement with a local farmer to purchase the Yacu-I Reserve, a plot of pristine subtropical forest with river access.

My guides and I had left the lodge early that morning to drive for 90 minutes along Route 101, a dirt track of fiery red soil overhanging with the boughs of rosewood trees, once the dominant species before the timber-hungry Spanish conquistadors arrived from the 1540s onwards. While I kayaked, my companions Chito Victor Dos Santos and Nona Silveira De Asis had prepared an *asado* barbecue of sizzling meats with *mbeju* — a type of pancake made with cassava flour, stuffed with cheese.

Knowing how to navigate the jungle is critical for survival. Nobody understands this forest better than the Indigenous Guarani, who have moved across vast areas spanning Brazil, Paraguay, Bolivia and Argentina

for hundreds of years. They were one of the first tribes to be contacted by Europeans when they arrived in these lands and around 11,000 still live in Misiones, with four communities neighbouring the Awasi lodge.

By special agreement, I'm invited into one of the villages and taken on a tour by local guide Karai José. Pulling up on a motorbike, dressed in jeans and a T-shirt, he looks like any other Argentine, but a passion for his culture runs deeper than any of the roots supporting this ancient forest.

Seeking shade from the sun, several children play outside mudbrick houses, while their parents tend to plantations of corn, sweet potatoes and cassava. Plants are still used for medicine in Guarani communities and traps set to catch animals for food. "But we never touch rosewood and we don't hunt certain animals during the mating season," insists Karai, demonstrating a respect for sustainability that's always been part of the Guarani's DNA. According to a legend, the forest goblin Pombero will terrorise anyone chopping down trees they don't need.

Sharing stories with younger generations is the key to preserving Guarani culture. The best-known tale describes the origins of Iguazú Falls, created when two lovers from rival tribes incurred the wrath of a demonic river goddess and were transformed into a mighty cascade called the Devil's Throat and a nearby tree.

Awasi guide Josefina Stocca recounts this legend the following morning when she takes me to the national park at 8am, before any crowds arrive. Vultures glide on thermals and swifts somersault through coils of mist tumbling from the curtain of cataracts like a maiden's silky locks. Overhead, a rainbow forms, bridging the water and forest. The Guarani interpret this phenomenon as the power of love conquering all evil. In a moment, it disappears. But it's a reminder of the natural connections that make Iguazú thrive.

How to do it: A nine-day Argentina trip costs from £5,299 per person based on two sharing, including three nights' all-inclusive at Awasi Iguazú and flights. [latinroutes.co.uk](https://www.latinroutes.co.uk)



Iguazú Falls
Previous pages from left:
Outdoor tables at El
Preferido de Palermo
restaurant in Buenos Aires;
the peaks of Los Glaciares
National Park in Patagonia



FOOD & DRINK

Culinary experiences in Buenos Aires

Honouring classic recipes and several historic waves of immigration, chefs in the capital are cooking up a sizzling food scene beyond the traditional grill

THE PERFECT MEDIALUNA

F5 Cantina Atelier Fuerza

Essentially Argentinian croissants, crescent-shaped *medialunas* ('half moons') are a sweet breakfast staple across the country. Find them stacked on oven-warm baking trays at this brick-walled *confiteria* (cake, pastry and coffee shop) in the central Villa Crespo neighbourhood. Head a few doors down to watch the bakers at work behind a large glass window, or come back in the evening, when the space turns into a pasta restaurant. [instagram.com/f5cantina](https://www.instagram.com/f5cantina)

THE PERFECT STREET FOOD

Gran Dabbang

Using a combination of Indian, Middle Eastern and Latin American flavours, chef Mariano Ramón approaches the kitchen with the maverick flair of Maradona on a football pitch. His menu of sharing dishes always scores highly: standouts include wood-fired bamboo

shoots and sliced mango wrapped in a bamboo leaf, or labne yoghurt and *huacatay* (Peruvian black mint) mixed with crunchy chickpea crisps. His restaurant is a tiny space spilling onto a street in trendy Palermo Soho, and fills early. [instagram.com/dabbang](https://www.instagram.com/dabbang)

THE PERFECT BRUNCH

Oli Cafe

Famous for her signature *medialunas*, tattooed pastry chef Olivia Saal has mastered all sorts of baked specialities at her buzzy and bright bistro in culinary hotspot Palermo Hollywood. Choose from sweet and savoury dishes for a bumper brunch, listening to jazz and watching chefs at work behind a glass wall or cement counter. The indulgent ghee-based French toast, caramelised with a blow torch and served with mascarpone yoghurt, fruit and fresh dill, has the city's cool crowd jostling for a table. [olicafe.com.ar](https://www.olicafe.com.ar)

From left: Plaza de Mayo, the main city square in Buenos Aires; 45-day dry-aged steak served at Elena restaurant

IMAGES: GETTY; FOUR SEASONS HOTEL BUENOS AIRES

THE PERFECT PIZZA

Chui

During the 19th and 20th centuries, around two million Italians moved to Argentina, bringing their culinary traditions with them. The pizzas at this vegetarian restaurant in Villa Crespo could match anything served in the motherland, with toppings ranging from sweet potato and pickled oyster mushrooms to onions and Argentinian reggianito cheese. Along with your pizza, try small plates of charred avocado with kimchi and tiger's milk marinade, or llanero cheese with fruit vinegar. [instagram.com/chui.ba](https://www.instagram.com/chui.ba)

THE PERFECT EMPANADA

Mengano

Chef Facundo Kelemen's take on empanadas — fried pastry pillows that are a classic South American comfort food — features beef, pepper, spices and a meat broth that bursts with flavour. It's part of a menu of small sharing plates reinventing time-honoured family recipes for contemporary diners. It's all served in an early 20th-century former home decorated with black-and-white photographs. Another highlight at this Palermo Soho restaurant is the sandwich with wagyu steak, slow-cooked at 80C for 14 hours. [instagram.com/mengano.ba](https://www.instagram.com/mengano.ba)

THE PERFECT PROVOLETA

El Preferido de Palermo

Provoleta cheese was created in the 1940s by an Italian immigrant, and it's typically heated in a skillet until crisp on the outside and gooey in the middle. This brasserie, decorated with jars of pickles and herbs hanging above a marble bar, melts it on a chickpea-flour pancake in a wood-fired oven. [instagram.com/elpreferidodepalermo](https://www.instagram.com/elpreferidodepalermo)

THE PERFECT DRY-AGED STEAK

Elena

Fine cuts of 45-day dry-aged steak dangle from the kitchen ceiling of Elena. Part of the Four Seasons, it sparkles with belle époque-era glamour, with waiters in silk waistcoats serving plates of charcuterie and beef to guests tucked into leather banquettes. [fourseasons.com](https://www.fourseasons.com)

THE PERFECT BARBECUE

La Carniceria

This Palermo Viejo grill house serves cuts of Aberdeen Angus reared on co-owner Germán Sitz's farm in the Pampas. La Carniceria ('butcher's shop') triumphs with honey-laced *mollejas* (sweetbreads) and melted bone marrow mopped up with bread, ensuring every part of the animal is used. [lacarniceria.com.ar](https://www.lacarniceria.com.ar) SARAH MARSHALL



Q&A

VANESSA BELL

Vanessa's made-to-measure Buenos Aires tours explore architecture, design, food, fashion and art

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE CULTURAL SPACE IN THE CITY?

Centro Cultural San Martín. There's a theatre at the front and a cinema behind showing art-house films. It's had a big overhaul and restoration, so looks absolutely beautiful — it feels like BA's equivalent of the Barbican.

CAN YOU RECOMMEND A LOCAL DESIGNER?

Catalina Chavanne, who's found a gap in the market working with quality Argentine fibres in her clothing — alpaca wool, linen, cotton. The prices in her shop, Blue Sheep, are a bit high for a local budget, but similar to high street prices in the UK. Her big selling point is a beautiful palette of colours. Wearable, perennial pieces, but also very fashion-forward.

WHERE DO YOU GO FOR COMFORT FOOD?

Parrilla Peña — it's central and easily accessible. I generally order the chicken or veal *milanesa* (escalope), fries and my favourite salad, carrot and *radicheta* (a bitter green), which only old-school restaurants tend to serve. And the meat empanadas are the stuff of fantasy.

INTERVIEW: SHAFIK MEGHJI

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