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BUDGET DESTINATION | ARGENTINA

Where a Buck's Still Worth a Buck

By [MICHELLE HIGGINS](#)

OVER the last five years, [Argentina](#) has been steadily recovering from its currency collapse in 2001. While the turnaround has yielded a bevy of new hotels and restaurants, the country is still surprisingly inexpensive for American visitors, with hotel rooms often half the price of their European counterparts, and steak dinners, even at high-end parrillas, rarely costing more than the equivalent of \$25.

“Argentina is one of the best travel bargains in the world, especially right now because the dollar hasn’t declined against the Argentinian peso,” said Carmen Frock, an American Express travel agent. For several years the dollar has remained steady at about three Argentine pesos.

“Instead of going to [Europe](#) and spending \$400 or \$500 for an average hotel,” she said, “they can go to Argentina and stay at a nice hotel from around \$150 to \$200 a night in [Buenos Aires](#).”

Indeed, with its sidewalk cafes, diverse cuisine, public parks and museums, many travelers compare the Argentine capital to European cities. But the comparison ends when it comes to hotel rates. A weekend stay at the Four Seasons in Buenos Aires in mid-January starts at \$425 a night, based on a recent online search. Similar rooms at the Four Seasons in [Milan](#) and [London](#) were listed at 650 euros (\$975 at \$1.50 to the euro) and £385 (\$770 at \$2 to the pound), respectively. One caveat: hotels’ listed rates normally don’t include tax, which can add about 20 percent to the cost of the room.

Looking for something cheaper than the Four Seasons? Sites like [www.boo.com](#) or [www.travellerspoint.com](#) feature youth hostels, guesthouses and low-cost hotels in Buenos Aires, Puerto Iguazú, [Mendoza](#), Bariloche, [El Calafate](#), [Ushuaia](#) and Salta. Other possibilities include stylish boutique hotels in Buenos Aires, like the Costa Petit Hotel, which opened last year in the trendy [Palermo](#) neighborhood with rates starting at \$150 a night, and the nearby Home Hotel, a 17-room hotel with a pool and [spa](#), which offers rooms from \$120 a night.

Tourists can also find stylish accommodations in less trodden regions that, while not all cheap, offer more value than what you might get elsewhere. Among them: House of Jasmines, the actor [Robert Duvall](#)’s 100-year-old ranch in the foothills of the Andes (from \$150 a night with tax); Los Cerros, a mountain lodge in El Chaltén, within [Los Glaciares National Park](#) (\$356 with tax); and Cavas [Wine](#) Lodge, a luxury resort 20 miles south of Mendoza (\$350).

But savings aren’t limited to hotel rates, as Leslie Wilson, 66, from Orinda, Calif., noticed on a November trip arranged by the Limitless Argentina luxury travel company. Entrees at good restaurants “were maybe \$10 to \$15,” she said. And the oversized handbag she scored at a Palermo boutique for less than \$200? In the [United States](#), “it could have been an \$800 bag,” she said.

Still, it's not inexpensive to fly to Argentina, with rates from roughly \$700 to \$1,800 for flights from New York to Buenos Aires, depending on the time of the year. (Peak season is mostly their summer — December to March — though [ski](#) resorts are also packed in July and August.) And travel within the country isn't cheap, with regional flights ranging from \$250 to \$600.

Several American tour operators have begun to capitalize on Argentina's affordability. Country Walkers, based in Waterbury, Vt., is offering its first tours to the country next year. Celebrity Cruises (including its Azamara brand) and Royal Caribbean Cruises will sail to Argentina 22 times next year and make 48 stops in places like Buenos Aires and Puerto Madryn in [Patagonia](#). That's up from 12 [cruises](#) and 26 stops this year.

"People see Argentina on the itinerary and it's very appealing," said Maria Sastre, vice president Latin America and [Caribbean](#) sales and marketing, Celebrity Cruises.

"People come back with a very high level of satisfaction from a culinary standpoint, from the tour standpoint, from the [architecture](#) of Buenos Aires. And then finally the people are very engaging. It's a wonderful experience for that discerning traveler."

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