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The 5 best things to do in BUENOS AIRES

Argentina's capital is the new cool destination, so I asked Buenos Aires expert Mike Howie for his must-dos in this city of grandeur

A 12-hour direct flight from Auckland, and you are in the capital of Argentina. Once too expensive to visit, it's now great value, and with its Parisian style and New York energy, the perfect mix of utter madness and olde-world class.

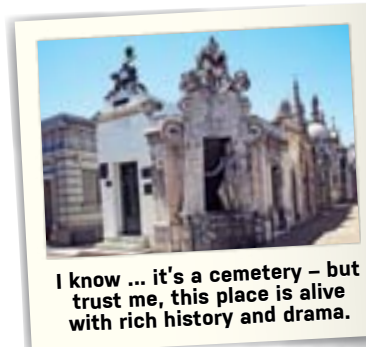
1 THE CULTURE

La Proa (meaning "boat bow" in Spanish) is a contemporary art gallery which opened two years ago in an old warehouse opposite one of the most polluted rivers in the world. Promising, eh? You'd think not, but it's amazing what a group of hip Milan architects can do! Now the whole neighbourhood is cleaned up and with three floors of continuously changing exhibition space and a rooftop café, this small but perfectly formed warehouse gallery is the perfect place to take a break from the hustle and bustle of Buenos Aires.



Practising the art of the cultured pose outside La Proa Gallery.

PICTURES: GETTY IMAGES.



I know ... it's a cemetery – but trust me, this place is alive with rich history and drama.

2 THE SIGHTSEEING

Recoleta Cemetery is in the heart of the "old money" Recoleta neighbourhood. Since 1822, it's been the last resting place for some of the city's wealthiest and most powerful citizens ... and rest in style they do. The private family mausoleums are set out in a maze of narrow avenues featuring every kind of angle, head bust and life-sized statue imaginable. Yes, Evita is here, but her dwelling is surprisingly humble compared to those around her. My personal favourite is Luis Firpo, the "wild bull of the pampas" – a heavyweight boxer whose larger-than-life statue features him in his boxing gown.

3 THEATRE OF LIFE

Futbol! To truly understand the Argentines, a trip to "la cancha" (the football pitch) is

essential. I suggest you arrange a guided tour to a game at River Plate Stadium, where most weekends you can catch 65,000 Argentines hugging, crying and singing ... depending on how well their team is doing. As it's a family affair, it's not unusual to see mothers teaching their young sons how to swear at the opposing team. Trust me, I've taken women who put live sport right up there with a visit to the dentist and they've come away totally energised after witnessing this most unique of Argentine spectacles – the crowd.



Who cares about the game? Watching the crowds at the footy is a truly exciting spectator sport.

4 THE NITTY-GRITTY

Pizza Güerrin is a classic working men's pizza joint. The best advice is to grab a couple of slices of pizza, that constantly come out of the blazing wood-fired oven from morning until the wee hours, and find some space

at the central "leaner" (forget the sit-down restaurant part). No doubt you'll be dining either with a local lawyer, a rubbish collector or a spoilt brat who has taken his girlfriend out in his dad's Mercedes for the evening. Enjoy the place in all its neon-lit ambience as this is the real deal – wash down with a glass of \$2 house red or a beer in an ice-chilled glass and enjoy.

5 SERENDIPITY

If you like a holiday that's all well-timed whistle stops, mini buses and ticking off highlights, don't go to Buenos Aires. However, if the thought of simply wandering along bustling streets with wall-to-wall shops and long avenues filled with French belle époque architecture appeals, then come on over. Buenos Aires neighbourhoods have something for everyone, from the frenetic pace of downtown to uptown Palermo with its high-end fashion boutiques and trendy restaurants where the socialites hang. Find a café to linger as long as you like and simply people-watch ... then wander off and see what's around the corner. Repeat as often as desired.

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