



TRIPS AFTER CHUKKAS

Have you found yourself coming home from a polo holiday in Argentina wishing that you had taken better advantage of the wonderful variety of things there are to see and do in the Buenos Aires area? Have you aspired to include more in your holiday than just chukkas and ponies, but found that your Argentine friend who organised the trip has little interest in anything beyond the front gates of his estancia? Having heard that this was the case for many of our readers, Polo Times decided to visit Buenos Aires and discover what else one can do on the days between chukkas and trips to the Abierto. **Adrian Gahan** reports.

Take a Private Tour of the City

Polo Times was lucky enough to secure the services of 'Argentina Autentica' - an Anglo-Argentine travel company specialising in bespoke holidays throughout Argentina. The city tour included the famous barrios of Palermo, Recoleta, La Boca and San Telmo - all shown to us by our hostess, Diana Figueroa Alcorta, an Anglo-Argentine lady with an encyclopaedic knowledge of the city and whose own family history seemed to perfectly illustrate the longstanding cultural links between Britain and Argentina.

Spend a morning taking a city tour before having lunch in one of the many superb restaurants of Palermo Viejo, or let Argentina Autentica spoil you by taking you to the Yacht Club Argentino (of which our tour guide was a member) and have lunch by the marina on the banks of the rive Plate.

Visit San Antonio de Areco

Located about 70 miles north west of the capital in the province of Buenos Aires, San Antonio de Areco is the place that you imagine all the polo grooms we see in England must come from. This is the very heart of gaucho country, with cobblestoned streets and centuries-old buildings surrounded by grassy plains. The town is famous for its artisans' workshops and silversmiths and it is well worth a visit to see them make rugs, ponchos, knives, jewellery and leatherware in their workshops. Get your timing right in November and you may also catch the local gaucho festival, the 'Dia de la Tradicion', with a parade and rodeo.

Watch and Play a Game of Pato

Unlike polo, which was imported into Argentina by the British, pato (meaning 'duck') is the

indigenous Argentine equestrian sport. Originally played with a (temporarily) live duck, nowadays a football with leather handles makes a more humane substitute. The ball is passed about between the four players on a team and thrown through a net at each end of the field to score - effectively netball on a horse. The extraordinary sight of the players reaching right down to the ground at full gallop in order to pick the ball up from the floor must be seen to be believed.

They say pato is a dying sport - primarily due to the financial attraction of polo, which induces many of pato's best players to convert to the more commercial game. But pato is still popular in the region of Las Heras, approximately 90kms west of Buenos Aires, where we visited the beautiful estancia of the Goicochea family. The Goicocheas arrange pato lessons, practice matches and exhibition games on their pato fields and were



Feature



Photographs by Linda Brownlee

only too happy to get the Polo Times team mounted to play a few chukkas of this extraordinary game. Pato is great fun to play as a beginner (more so than polo as ball control is far easier), but it is also far more dangerous than its more popular relative - you have been warned! This is a 'must-try' for any polo enthusiast. Indeed, the trip would be worthwhile purely to see the beautiful estancia house and to enjoy the enormous lunch of asado, empanadas and all the gaucho fare one can possibly consume.

See Boca Juniors play at La Bombonera

The football club that produced Diego Maradona, Boca Juniors, is based at La Bombonera. Seeing a game there is one of BA's ultimate experiences. Matches are a heady cocktail of noise, fireworks and abuse of the opposition! The club's arch-rivals are River Plate and the local derby match (or 'superclasicos') between the two is the stuff of legend. Argentina Authentica will organise tickets and provide someone who knows the area to accompany you - you are advised not to visit on your own!

Go to a Tango Club

There is no shortage of tango clubs in Buenos Aires, though many are little more than theatre for visitors. If you go off the beaten tourist track, however, there is a wonderful milonga and tango club scene where real portenos go to drink, dance, flirt and socialize. It is a memorable sight to behold - quintessentially Argentine and overflowing with style, tragedy, emotion and sexuality that cannot be reproduced. Contact Argentina Authentica for a list of venues and dates.

See a Concert at the Teatro Colon

One of the iconic images of Buenos Aires and arguably one of the most beautiful theatres in the world, no visit to this city could be considered complete without a visit to the Teatro Colon. The Colon presents ten full operas a year and regular recitals from the Orquesta Filarmonica de Buenos Aires or the resident Orquesta Estable del Teatro Colon, as well as visiting international ensembles. So no matter when you visit, you will be guaranteed some world-class classical entertainment. Visit www.teatrocolon.org.ar for more information.

Who Will Do This For You?

This selection of trips and entertainment can all be organised by Oliver Stone and Mercedes Sandberg of Argentina Authentica. Although most of us polo visitors to Argentina organise our holidays through our friendly Argentine club professional, polo professionals know confessedly little about what else they can show you on your holiday beyond polo. Argentina Authentica are experts and have done all the research and hard work for you in sourcing the most exciting and unique events to see anywhere in Argentina - whether you have only an afternoon or two to spare or a whole month for a bespoke holiday, designed exactly to your own tastes.

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