

Buenos Aires AR August 1-4, 2012

From the USA, almost all flights to and from Argentina take all night from Atlanta, typically a 15-hour trip. We arrived at 8am on July 31st surprisingly alert. As the threatened rain had not yet arrived, we took a City tour. For the next three days, Nancy worked in the hotel while I took a cab or subway to attend the International Sociological Association meetings. I gave two presentations and presided over a session I had organized on "World Suffering." All were well received and successful, and I may have found a book publisher as well.

The venue for the meeting was unforgettable. It was a complex of buildings of the University of Buenos Aires for the faculties of medicine and economics. Most memorable was the lack of heat in the middle of winter. The classrooms had small radiators but they produced no heat, despite temperatures in the high 40s and low 50s most of the time. And the last two days the rain poured very hard, making it difficult to not only navigate the streets but the University buildings. Fortunately, I had an umbrella and raincoat but still got soaked getting to and from the subway.

The subway was another story worth telling. It was crowded but during the rain, it was literally packed, just like Tokyo's trains, only here they did not have pushers – people who pressed people through the doors, so that the doors could close. One subway trip, I could not reach any railing or fixture, so I had to let my body sway with the tightly packed mass of people. The people of Argentina are quite lean, so there were about twice as many people packed into the train car as would be possible in the United States. Feeling held upright by the crowd was almost a pleasant feeling, but if the power had gone out, it could have been tragic.

The City reminded me a lot of New York City, but Paris or Madrid would be better analogies because the Argentinians identify much more with Europe than the States. At one historic period, the rulers idealized Paris and build French style buildings. British architects have been used a lot in the last 100 years, but Spanish architecture predominates.

We stayed in the eastern part of the City called Puerto Madero. Huge skyscrapers of glass panels and trendy shops and restaurants have been built into the old warehouses of the former port. The most picturesque piece of this area is Puente de la Mujer (Bridge of the Woman), which is supposed to artistically capture the lines of a woman's leg during tango dancing. Tango for Argentinians is like movie going to Americans. On weekends, and even during the week, they eat dinner at 10pm, go to the tango dance clubs at 1-3am, depending upon whether they have to work the next day and then dance as late as 6am. Nancy and I never went to a dance club but we did encounter tango street dancers, and we each took out turn learning some of the essential positions, as you can see in the pictures. This "dancing" took place in the Boca area, which is known by its shops and restaurants painted in many, very bright colors.

The most popular area of the City is called the Plaza de Mayo, with the famous Casa Rosada (Pink House), which is the official residence of the President. It has long been the site of most demonstrations and military coups but was made world famous by Evita Peron, who gave speeches to the workers from her 2nd floor window. It was there that she, and later Madonna, acting as Evita in the well-known movie, made famous the phrase "Don't Cry for me Argentina."

Evita is still a national hero and is entombed in her family tomb in the aristocratic Recoleta Cemetery where the fashionable families bought or rented a few square meters of ground building castle-like tombs for many generations of family members. Many of the tombs are many times taller than they are wide because of the high cost of land. The architecture ranges from ancient Greek and Roman to modern French and stones of many different shapes and colors. There are nearly 1,000 tombs and even more statues as most tombs have at least one statue. The tombs are in much better condition than those of New Orleans because of less humidity and greater care. The cemetery has streets and alleys like any normal town, but no vehicles are allowed, and I was surprised to catch with my camera a kissing couple in the deep darkness of the tombs.

Needless to say, the tombs are carefully guarded, especially Eva Peron's. She is buried 20 feet underground because her body had been stolen and shipped to Europe by the military regime that overtook the Peron government. Interestingly, the current president is a woman and a Peronist. Her main residence is 20 miles away and she commutes to the Executive Mansion by helicopter.

Despite the stark contrasts in wealth left over from the aristocrat traditions of several centuries, the government has done a lot toward bringing many out of poverty. In the news here, we saw a lot of evidence of most South American countries attempting to create a union something like the EU. After spending a few days here, I expect much more economic power from South America than I previously did. We also have more respect for their culture and traditions.



Uniformed School Children Visiting Official Exec Gov Pink House



Eva's 2nd Floor window from which Madonna Sang Dont Cry for Me AR



Recoleta Cemetery Roadways and Mausoleums



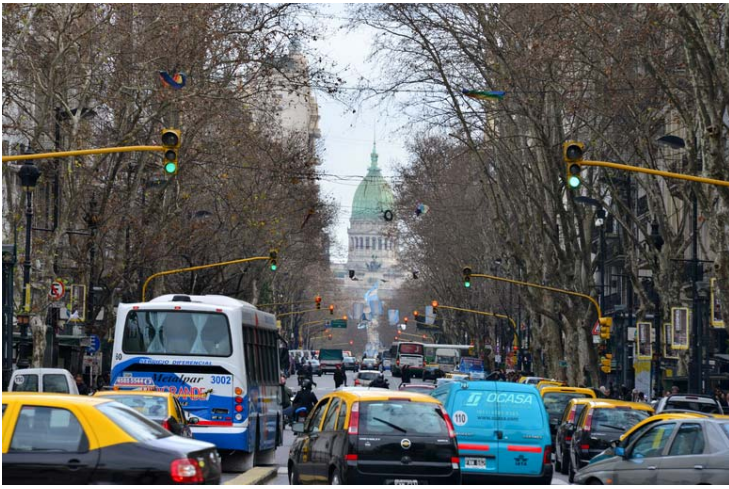
romance among the dead in Buenos Aires



Haunting Woman and Dog in Copper



Eva Peron Family Tomb



National Parliament Building in Buenos Aires



Obelisk in Central Buenos Aires



Bridge of the Woman in Puerto Madero



Puerto Madero the 20 year old converted Port



Puerto Madero the old and the new



Tango Bar in Boca



Nancy the Tango Dancer



Ron Pretends to Tango in the Street



Tango Experts in the Boca Club Area