

Argentina

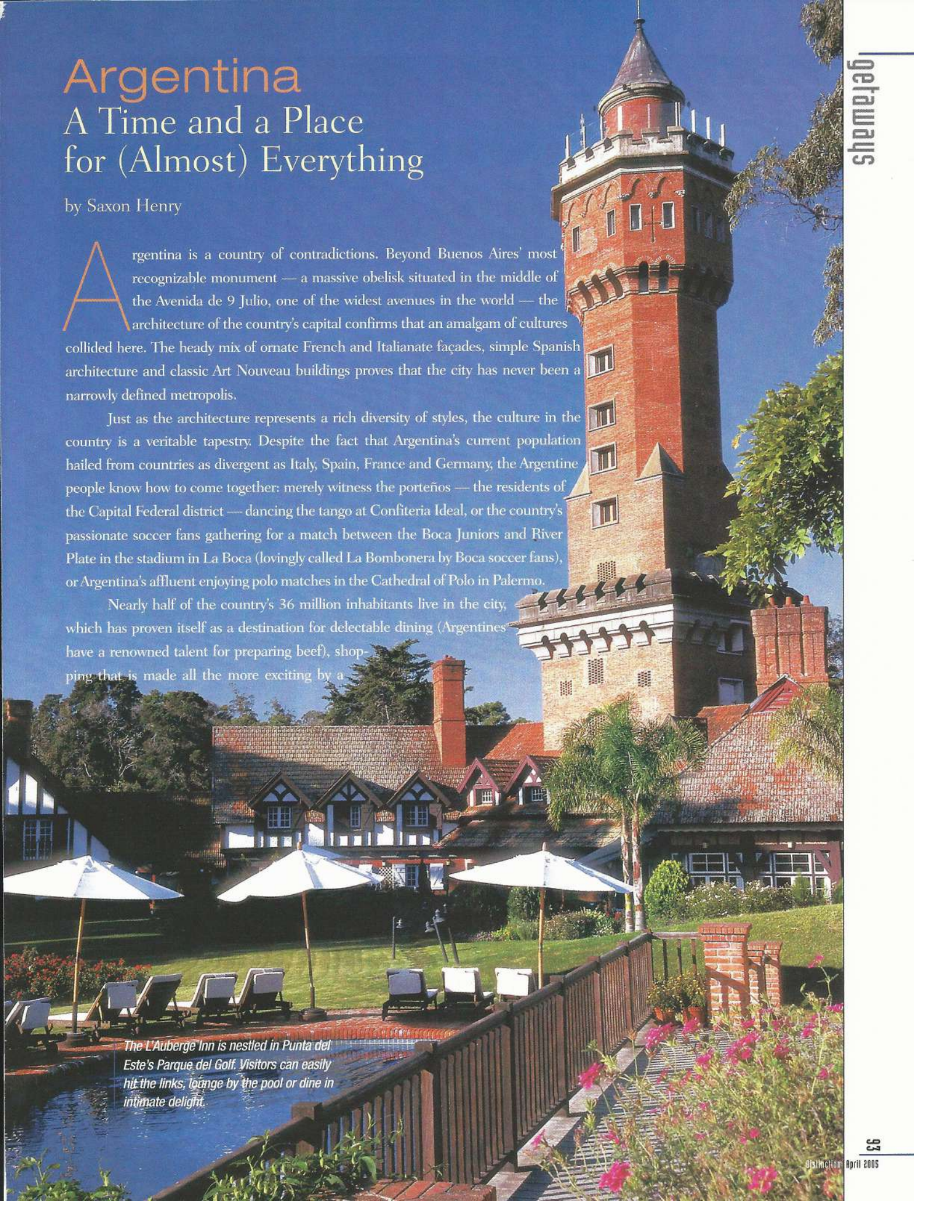
A Time and a Place for (Almost) Everything

by Saxon Henry

Argentina is a country of contradictions. Beyond Buenos Aires' most recognizable monument — a massive obelisk situated in the middle of the Avenida de 9 Julio, one of the widest avenues in the world — the architecture of the country's capital confirms that an amalgam of cultures collided here. The heady mix of ornate French and Italianate façades, simple Spanish architecture and classic Art Nouveau buildings proves that the city has never been a narrowly defined metropolis.

Just as the architecture represents a rich diversity of styles, the culture in the country is a veritable tapestry. Despite the fact that Argentina's current population hailed from countries as divergent as Italy, Spain, France and Germany, the Argentine people know how to come together: merely witness the porteños — the residents of the Capital Federal district — dancing the tango at Confiteria Ideal, or the country's passionate soccer fans gathering for a match between the Boca Juniors and River Plate in the stadium in La Boca (lovingly called La Bombonera by Boca soccer fans), or Argentina's affluent enjoying polo matches in the Cathedral of Polo in Palermo.

Nearly half of the country's 36 million inhabitants live in the city, which has proven itself as a destination for delectable dining (Argentines have a renowned talent for preparing beef), shopping that is made all the more exciting by a



The L'Auberge Inn is nestled in Punta del Este's Parque del Golf. Visitors can easily hit the links, lounge by the pool or dine in intimate delight.

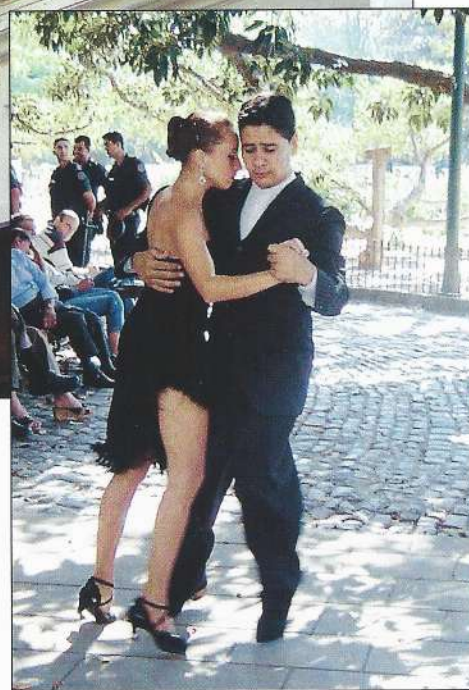


favorable exchange rate for the dollar, and luxury accommodations. Among the city's best hotels is the Alvear Palace, which has welcomed celebrities and royalty from Madonna to Prince Charles and Princess Diana. Adorned with period Louis XIV and Louis XVI furnishings, the hotel is elegance personified. It's located in the Recoleta, one of the most stylish neighborhoods in the city, as is the Etoile Hotel, which also offers posh accommodations.

Within walking distance of both hotels are outdoor markets, a mélange of restaurants and the Recoleta Cemetery, home of the Duarte family tomb. Evita Peron is enshrined there and still draws hundreds of visitors daily, many of whom still leave flowers and notes of affection nearly 53 years after her death. There is also a sumptuously appointed Four

Seasons Hotel in the heart of the city, which, like all of the luxury hotels in Buenos Aires, provides extensive concierge services to help tourists navigate the city and book tours. Some hotels also offer luxury car service from the airport.

The list of things to do in the city is extensive. Film enthusiasts should plan to visit in April for the annual Buenos Aires Film Festival. If you're an art and antiques lover, the San Telmo neighborhood will be an important stop. Not only are the narrow, cobble streets lined with art galleries and antique shops, weekends bring a sprawling outdoor antiques market to Dorrego Square. You'll also find the fine leather and suede goods for which Argentine craftsmen are lauded in San Telmo and in shops along Florida



Argentina's National Academy of Tango sits atop Café Tortoni.

Inset, tango dancers in Recoleta, where they sometimes dance all day for the coins collected in an upturned hat.

Peatonal, an outdoor mall near the Retiro neighborhood. Puerto Madero, one of Buenos Aires' newest developments, is a shopping and dining destination that is nestled between the city's waterfront and a nature preserve. Al fresco dining with water views makes for a welcome



lunch break during a day of shopping or a tranquil evening repast.

Nighttime entertainment in Buenos Aires includes tango and milonga performances by some of Argentina's best dancers. Tango halls — which combine dining and dancing — dot the city, each with a unique flair. Capturing the Old-World feel of the early tango halls are Confitería Ideal and Café Tortoni, where the enshrined bust of Carlos Gardel serves as a reminder that at one time the country's greatest hero was a tango singer. Another worthwhile visit is to the very first tango hall, Caminito, in the colorful neighborhood of La Boca.

If you prefer more than a spectator's appreciation of the dance, private and group classes are plentiful. Tango

studios can be found in many Buenos Aires locales, like the Galerías Pacífico Shopping Mall, another upscale shopping and dining destination where tango performances and jazz concerts take place each week. Printed pamphlets listing classes are available at tourism kiosks throughout the city, and the concierge staff at most hotels can assist in making arrangements for lessons. All of the city's attractions are listed in comprehensive guides that can also be found at these kiosks. Unless you are fluent in Spanish, be sure to ask for a bilingual guide.

If limiting your adventures to one place is not your idea of a dream vacation, excursions for every taste depart from Buenos Aires daily. Tours of Argentina's

A typical Spanish-style building in downtown Colonia, near Argentina in Uruguay.

Inset, at Puerto Madero, is a popular Buenos Aires shopping and dining destination.

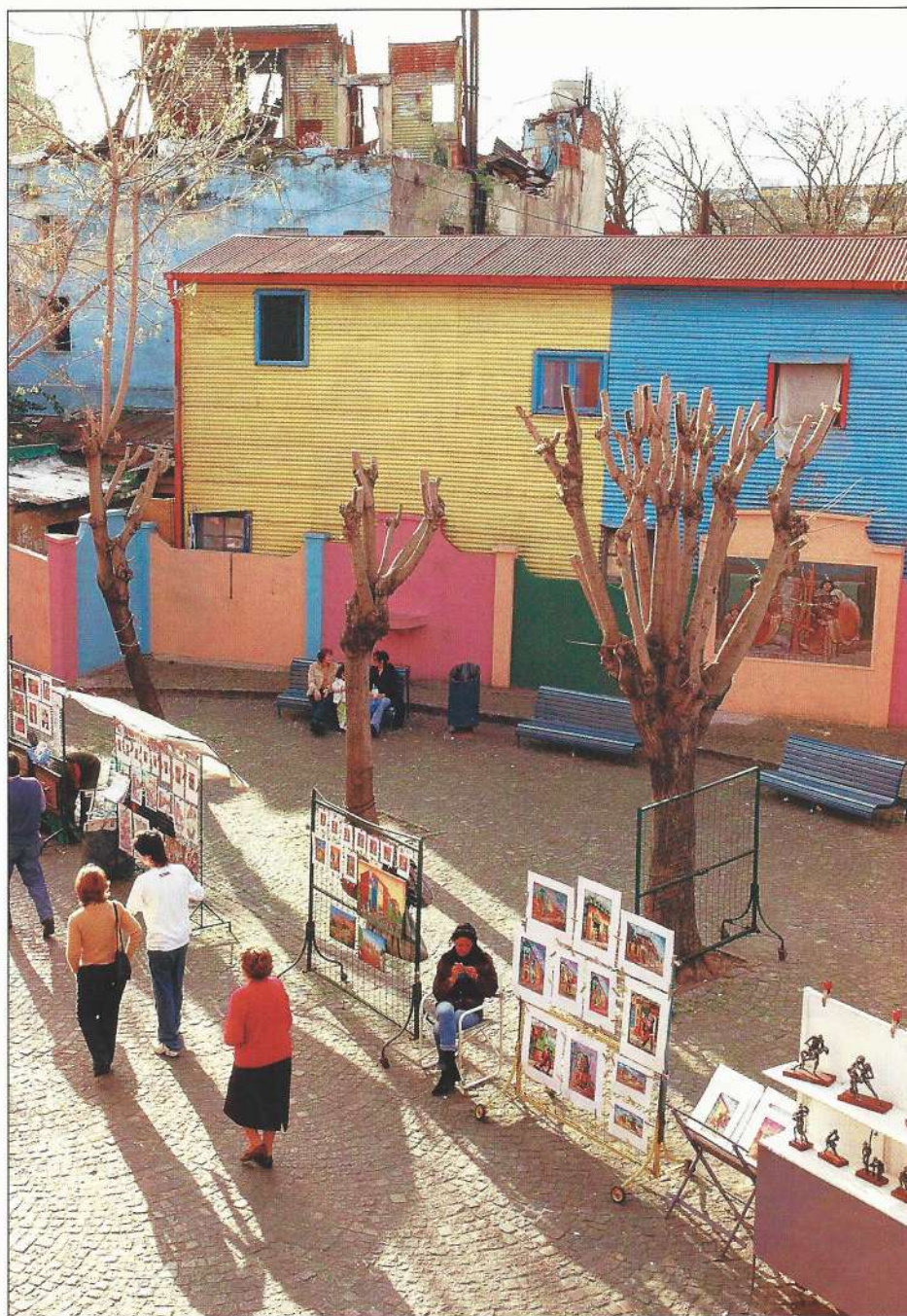
wineries, which are ensconced in five provinces skirting the country's border with Chile, are easy to arrange. You'll taste Argentina's signature wine, Malbec, and an expanding list of new varietals that are quickly growing in popularity.

Day trips for horseback riding will take you to La Pampa, where gauchos, or Argentine cowboys, still ride the ranges; golf lovers can go just outside the city to face the challenging holes on premier courses. Those who love sailing can take either day or night excursions on the Rio de la Plata — the widest river in the

world — or relax on longer voyages to the beaches of Argentina and Uruguay.

If sailing is not your cup of tea, regular ferry service is available to Uruguay, where you can comb the picturesque city of Colonia, Uruguay's oldest. The adobe and stone buildings, whitewashed walls set with colorful tile maps, streets paved with ballast from early-arriving ships and a picturesque waterfront lend Colonia abundant charm. Ferry schedules allow for morning departures and evening returns, but if you love experiencing living history or are a buff of Spanish and Moorish architecture, an overnight stay at the Hostal del Sol or the Artemisa Spa would be a treat. Stops on city tours include the town's old fort and the bullring — which hasn't echoed with the cheers of spectators during bullfights since 1912 due to protests by animal activists from Buenos Aires. And if strolling through quaint lanes lined with a pleasing mix of Basque, Catalan, Andalucian and Ibizan architecture is your delight, but not a passion for your other half, note this: gambling is legal in Colonia, so the city's nightlife is anything but boring.

Gambling is also a favorite pastime in another popular Uruguayan destination, Punta del Este, a seaside playground for some of South America's wealthiest. A short plane ride from Buenos Aires will transport you to the sprawling city, which clings to the hem of Maldonado Bay. Casinos and luxury high-rise hotels in the thriving town intermingle with quieter inns like L'Auberge, which is set like a gemstone in the heart of Punta del Este's Parque del Golf. Dotted with antiques, the country-French-inspired interiors are warm and inviting. There are only 12



La Boca is Buenos Aires' most colorful neighborhood. Artists line the streets on weekends to sell their wares.

rooms in the luxury hotel, and the intimate dining room offers exquisitely prepared meals in a romantic setting. Punta del Este boasts two coasts, the Costa Brava, or brave coast of the Atlantic, and the Costa Mansa, or quiet coast, where the Atlantic meets the Rio de la Plata. Beachfront restaurants along either coast — such as Parador La Huella, an open-air restaurant in Faro José Ignacio — offer a variety of dishes from fresh seafood to deliciously pre-

pared beef, all served with a side of refreshing sea breeze.

If you want to venture farther afield, more tours from Buenos Aires are available. Escape to Patagonia, for instance, where you can cruise alongside the glaciers at Calafate or watch the whales at the Peninsula de Valdes. Or

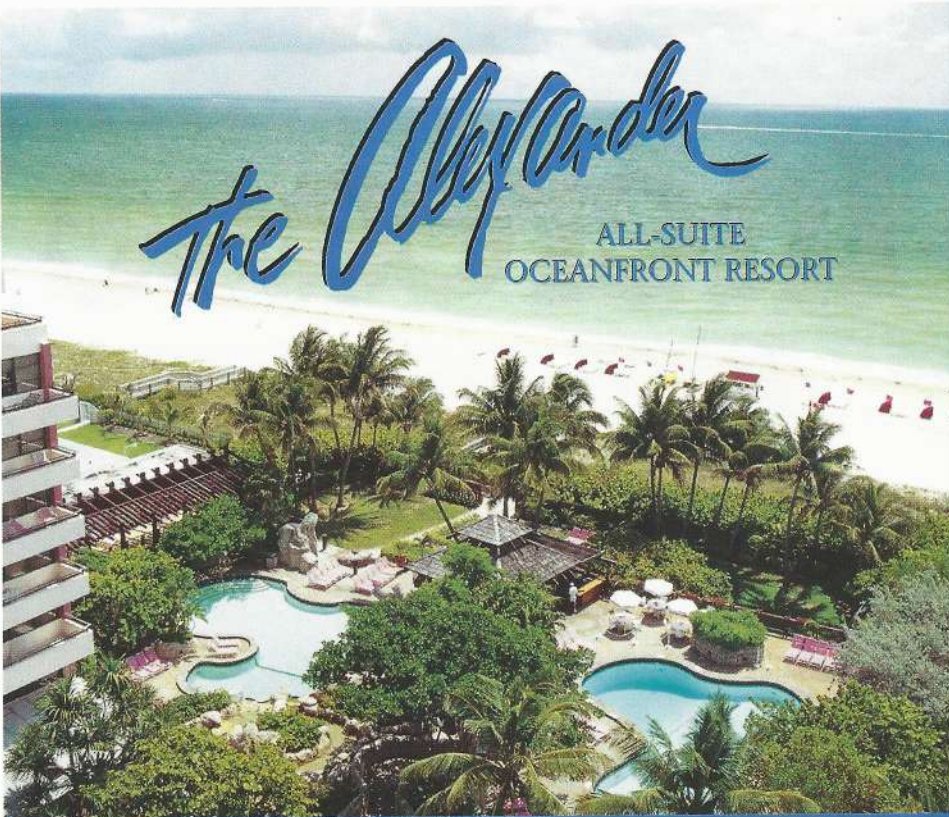
travel to Iguazu, in the northeast quadrant of the country where mists rise high into the air above the spectacular waterfalls. If snow skiing enthralls you, excursions to Santa Cruz or Bariloche will have you swishing along powdery slopes in no time. For nature lovers, trips to observe the wildlife along Argentina's coastline will bring you delightfully close to Rockhopper penguins, snowy sheathbills and seals, all of which thrive on and around the rocky shores near Puerto Deseado.

Fishermen travel from around the world to cast their lines into Patagonian waters, and fishing lodges proliferate along the 3,000 kilometers of rivers and 40,000 hectares of lakes in the region. Jungle excursions are also offered to Patagonia. An American couple I met in Buenos Aires had flown to the Patagonian jungle to see tigers in the wild. The husband remarked that it was one of the most amazing trips that they had ever experienced. "I'm a seasoned traveler and I'm not easily impressed!" he added for emphasis.

Because Argentina and Uruguay are in the southern hemisphere, the seasons are opposite of ours, so when it is cold and snowy on Long Island, it is balmy in South America, and when it is hot and humid here, ski resorts in Argentina are in full swing. When you hear Bienvenido a Argentina, you'll know you're about to begin an adventure in which there is a time and a place for almost everything. 🦊

Planning a trip to Argentina? We think you'll find these Web sites helpful:

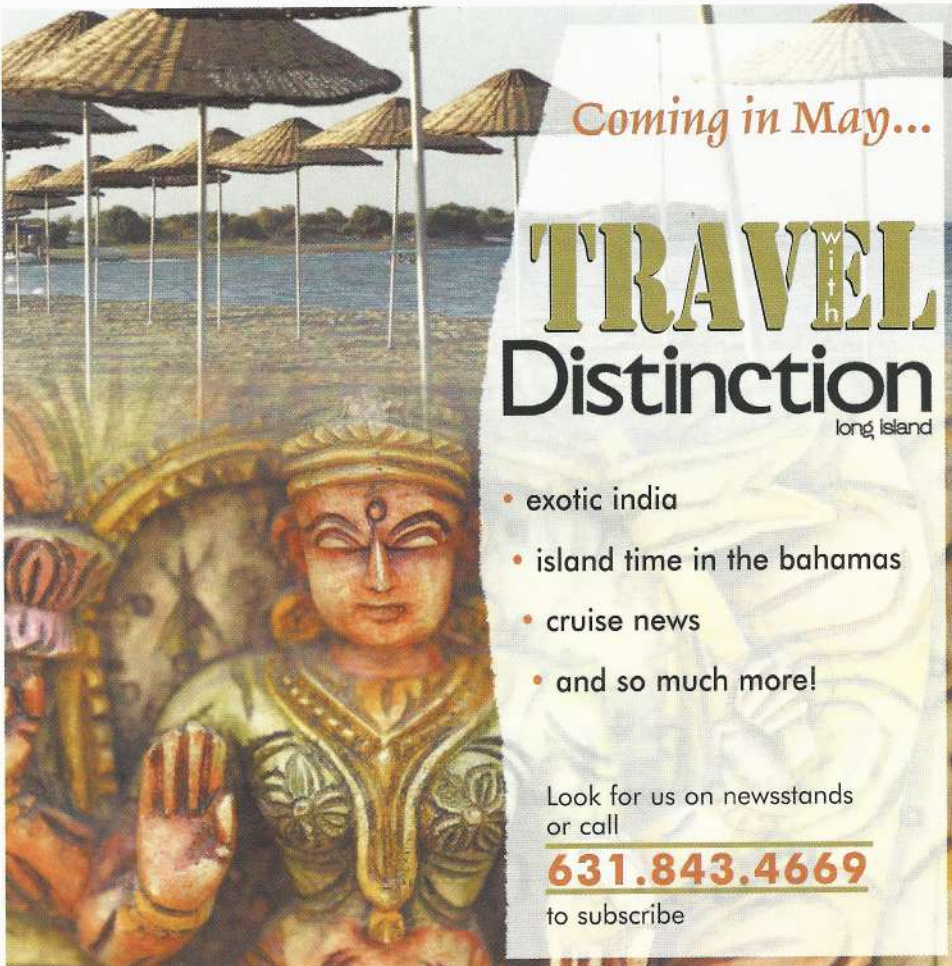
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