

MENDOZA, SAN JUAN, LA RIOJA, CATAMARCA & CORDOBA

Atuel + Talampaya + Valle Fértil + Pampa El Leoncito + Portezuelo + La Cumbrecita

A really extraordinary journey through the centre and west of Argentina. Beginning in Mendoza where we will take the wine route, continue along the Cañón del Atuel to go to San Juan, to the Valle de la Luna (Moon Valley), Valle de Calingasta and Pampa El Leoncito. La Rioja is the next destination, with the Talampaya National Park. We go up to Catamarca and the Cuesta del Portezuelo to discover Córdoba as a farewell.



16 days - 15 nights

- ✓ Accommodation and breakfast - Double Room
- ✓ Transfer IN OUT APT/HTL/APT
- ✓ Regular Tours with Spanish & English Guide
- ✓ Permanent Coordination
- ✓ Food and Air tickets not included
- ✓ Guide Bilingual Spanish & English

Itinerary

day
1

Mendoza

Reception and transfer from Mendoza Airport to Hotel.

day
2

Knowing Mendoza

Breakfast at hotel. We dedicate half a day to visit the city of Mendoza, famous for its legendary trees, wide sidewalks and its great order and cleanliness. Founded over 400 years ago by the first colonists, this city offers a lot of history and culture. We will visit La Alameda, the historical zone where Pedro del Castillo founded this large city in 1561, where most shops and civic life was concentrated until it disappeared with the 1861 earthquake. The town council was, in the old days, where the Foundational Area Museum is nowadays. There are still remains of what once was the San Francisco church. We continue to the new city, post-earthquake. We visit its principal avenues, the downtown, the Plaza Independencia



(Independence Square), the civic neighbourhood with the Government House, the Law Courts and the General San Martin Park going along the Civit Avenue, entering the park through the Portones (Gates). We can enjoy the beautiful woods in the park, as well as the Rosedal (rose garden) next to the lake and the clubs located in the area. We also meet the Caballitos de Marly (Marly Little Horses, replica of the ones in Paris), the Fuente de los Continentes (the Fountain of the Continents), etc. Then we climb the Cerro de La Gloria (The Glory Mount) where there is a monument to the Ejercito Libertador (the Liberator Army) and very near it, the Greek theatre Frank Romero Day.

Optional - Along the road to Caracoles up to Villaviciencia

Breakfast at hotel. This road is loaded with history, as it is the route that the General Jose de San Martin and his Ejercito Libertador (Liberator Army) took in his campaign to free Chile and Peru. Something on everyone's memory is the Canota Monument. We ascend along the Road of Caracoles, quite steep, to arrive at the Villaviciencia hotel, famous for being on the labels of the best mineral water in Argentina, although it is closed, it has a double beauty: natural, thanks to the beauty of the landscape where it is located, and beautiful from the architecture point of view. We go to the chapel through the dense vegetation covering the gully.



Along the Andean Range bordering the Mendoza river.

Breakfast at the hotel. This program takes us to the limit with Chile crossing the Cordillera de los Andes (Andean Mountain Range) along the Routes 40 and 7 bordering the Mendoza river. We go by the Potrerillo Reservoir which contains the Mendoza river waters and along the Uspallata Valley dividing the foothills from the mountain range. We make a short detour to visit the Picheuta Bridge, a real milestone as General Jose de San Martin crossed it with The Andean Army when crossing the Andes. We will visit the most imposing Andean massif, the Aconcagua Mount, with its 6.962 meters over sea level and we watch the Puente del Inca (Inca Bridge), which is a natural bridge with a famous history and thermal waters. We stop at the entrance of the park to make a short walk to be able to watch the southern side of the Aconcagua and enjoy the sight of the Horcones Lake. The journey continues along the Route 7 and takes us to the ski resort Los Penitentes, up to the border town of Las Cuevas and with good weather we climb to the Cristo Redentor Monument (Christ The Redeemer). We can optionally have lunch (not included) to return later to Mendoza city.



Atuel Canyon.

Breakfast at the hotel. We set off from San Rafael towards the Cuesta de los Terneros to go to Dique Valle Grande and the Atuel river. We stop at the San Francisco de Asis lookout point to enjoy a terrific sight of the city and the canyon. After several kilometres we enter El Nihuil which is impressive for the depth of its lake. We rest and may have lunch (not included). We set off to the Atuel Canyon, to be trapped by a landscape of pure beauty, typical of the andean ecosystem, due to the erosive action of winds and water creating natural sculptures becoming awesome landforms, fanciful shapes of mother nature such as Museo de Cera (Wax Museum), el Lagarto (the Alligator), Los Monstruos (the Monsters), Los Jardines Colgantes (The Hanging Gardens) or La Ciudad Encantada (The Haunted City), etc. The canyon is formed by the Atuel river, Valle Grande Reservoir and El Nihuil. We make a short walk along the canyon to arrive at the Valle Grande. The ones who want adventure tourism, can enjoy rafting, rappel or a boat voyage (all these activities must be booked at



Argentinian Explorer

destination).

Optional: Rafting in Mendoza

Breakfast at the hotel. The Cañon del Atuel river is a synonym of rafting and is famous in all the country for its rapids and the transparency of its water which combine with the beauty of the place. The river is navigable every month except June with a difficulty level 2, based on the international scale from 0 to 6, its average depth is 1,20 meters.



5 San Juan & its surroundings

Breakfast at the hotel. We visit the principal places of interest in the city of San Juan, which is located in the centre north of the Valle del Tulum. This city was practically destroyed by an earthquake in 1944, thus it is one of the newest cities in Argentina. It is the city where Domingo Faustino Sarmiento was born, he was president of Argentina and a great creator of the public education. The most important attractions in San Juan are the Embalse de Ullum, the Quebrada de Zona and the Ruta del Vino (Wine Route). Within our visit we can visit the house where Sarmiento was born, the only colonial testimony left in the city, with 9 rooms and 3 servants' rooms with 2 courtyards, typical distribution of that time. Another place worth visiting is the Cathedral, in honour of San Juan Bautista (St. John Baptist), which is one of the most modern churches as it was first built in 1712 by the Compañía de Jesús and rebuilt in 1979 after the earthquake. Other interesting places are the Auditorio Juan Victoria, the cultural place par excellence, the Museo Sanmartiniano, etc. Then we visit the Ullum dam and the Cavas de Zonda, where we will taste first quality San Juan wines.



6 From San Juan up to the Valle de Calingasta & Pampa del Leoncito

Breakfast at the hotel. There are different options to choose.

Visit to Calingasta & Barreal

We set off to Pampa del Leoncito, then we go to the Astronomical Observatory and the Cerro Alcázar. During this mountain road, we see the cerro Villicúm, the Quebrada de las Burras, Talacasto town, entering Calingasta up to the Barreal. From there we go to Pampa del Leoncito where wind-car is practised thanks to the sustained winds that blow more than 80km per hour. The wind-car is a small vehicle with 2 car wheels at the back and a motorbike wheel at the front, it has a fuselage and a mast made of aluminium to be light and be able to move with great impulse. The Pampa del Leoncito also called Barreal Blanco is a geological structure next to the Barreal town, where a natural reserve has been created. It is a plain with arid and cracked soil 15km long per 5km wide, which before was the bottom basin of a lake, without vegetation of any kind, similar to a spider web.

The vision is atypical and the white colour is very deep. We can observe the impressive Mercedario Mount 6,772m high and then have lunch at the Barreal. It is the most important tourist centre of the valley, a town with dirt streets and beautiful poplars, where we will also visit the astronomical complex El Leoncito. It is an observatory located at the foot of the mountain range, 2,500m over sea level, in the San Juan Astronomical Reserve, occupying



almost 70,000 hectares, being an excellent place to observe the space. Once again in San Juan, we will enjoy a spectacular view of the Cerro Alkazar.



From San Juan to Valle Fértil

Breakfast at the hotel. We leave towards Valle Fértil, going through the Difunta Correa Sanctuary in the town of Vallecito, San Juan. There is a great popular devotion from Catholic people although she was not recognized by the Catholic Church. Her followers believe in her miracles and consider her a popular Saint, worshipped as a Goddess. We arrive at the Ischigualasto Provincial Park to discover the Valle de la Luna and its five stations.

This park has an extension of 62,000 hectares and is 330km away from San Juan capital city. It boasts a considerable paleontological and geological patrimony, UNESCO declared it as Natural Heritage of Humanity in the year 2000. Ischigualasto belongs to the Triassic period, 300 million years ago, and it is an accurate representation of those times when the first mammals and dinosaurs spread. It was in these lands where one of the oldest dinosaurs, the Eoraptor Lunensis was found. Its principal landforms are: El Gusano, Valle Pintado, Cancha de Bochas, El Submarino, El Hongo and Los Colorados. We go back to Valle Fértil in the afternoon, where we will spend the night.



We leave the Valle de La Luna to go to Talampaya, La Rioja

Breakfast at the hotel. We get up early to leave San Juan province and travel to La Rioja province to Villa Unión to visit the Talampaya National Park. Villa Unión has 6,000 inhabitants and is located on a valley between the foothills of the Andes and the formidable Famatina mountain range, 60km away from the park. Talampaya is a natural reserve with sites of great archaeological-paleontological value due to the number of fossils found, such as the Lagosuchus Talampayensis, dinosaur of the Mesozoic era. To sum up, this park is a product of the intense tectonic movements and wind erosion produced during millions of years. It has 215,000 hectares and it is famous for its incredible red rock cliffs and the wind sculptured eroded figures where condors nest. Its rocks belong to the Triassic period in the Mesozoic Era where the first dinosaurs' pawprints are found. The return journey to San Juan is through the majestic Cuesta de Huaco.



We continue along La Rioja, Chilecito & La Rioja Capital

Breakfast at the hotel. We say goodbye to Villa Unión to go to La Rioja through Cuesta de Miranda, caught between the Sierras de Famatina and the Sierras de Sañogasta (small mountain ranges). These hills have one of the few good roads linking the Valle de Chilecito with Cuyo. It is the obliged route to join Villa Unión with Chilecito. The Cuesta de Miranda shows a landscape full of different reddish shades, a path that draws a silhouette between the hills and the canyon of the river with the same name, ending in an edge road with stunning curves and gullies. Before that, we had entered Chilecito, the second important city in La Rioja, located in the Valle Antinaco – Los Colorados and hidden between the Sierras de Velasco and Famatina. It is a zone dedicated to the winery industry and the walnut and fruit trees plantations. We arrive at the capital city in the afternoon.



**Argentinian
Explorer**

day

10 La Rioja and its charms

Breakfast at the hotel. We will discover the principal charms of La Rioja city, we will also go to the Dique Los Sauces. This capital city with the soul of a town, has a square called 25 de Mayo which is the centre of the metropolis and the Government House of Greco-Roman style adapted with an entrance hallway and courtyards with galleries. In front of the square there is a Social Club where exhibitions take place and the San Nicolás de Bari Basilica of Byzantine style. The house of the former governor Joaquín Víctor González is very interesting to visit, too. It has a colonial style with a Medieval Castle image, built in the middle of the 19th Century. There is also the Santo Domingo Temple, built in stone with an outstanding carved carob wooden door, in 1623 by the natives. Finally there is a Museum of Religious Art.

day

11 Catamarca & Cuesta del Portezuelo

Breakfast at the hotel. We know the city of Catamarca during the morning. From the Basilica, the Paseo de la Fe, 25 de Mayo Square, San Francisco Convent up to the Handcraft Market. We set off to the Cuesta del Portezuelo arriving at the Dique Las Piquitas in the afternoon. The Cuesta del Portezuelo is a beautiful, long and winding road which is almost 1,700m over sea level, where we will have spectacular views of the Valle de Catamarca (the Catamarca Valley) crossed by the Paclín river and the Sierra de Ambato. This downhill has been immortalized in the zamba Paisaje de Catamarca, sung by the famous Argentine folklore group: Los Chalchaleros. During the journey we enjoy different towns by the roadside.

day

12 Salida desde Catamarca a Córdoba

Breakfast at the Hotel. Transfer to the bus terminal in San Fernando del Valle de Catamarca, to travel to the city of Córdoba. We'll have the rest of the afternoon free.

day

13 Knowing Córdoba City

Breakfast at hotel. We begin our tour around the city of Córdoba. During the excursion we can observe the influence of colonial times in the architecture, contrasting with modern designs. The places of interest we visit are the San Martín Square, before called Plaza Mayor, to stroll around the historical and cultural quarters of the old town, today the microcentre. Places of interest are: the Cathedral, the Cabildo, Santa Catalina Convent, the Cripta del Noviciado, the Oratorio del Obispo Mercedillo, the Compañía de Jesús Church founded by San Ignacio de Loyola located on the Jesuit Square in downtown, The Monserrat National School which is the second oldest in Argentina, after the Inmaculada Concepción School in Santa Fe, from 1687. It was in this school where the first printing company in the country worked. We continue to the Sagrado Corazón Church which belongs to the Capuchin Priests outstanding for its neo-gothic architecture designed by the Italian Augusto Ferrari, then we go to the Nueva Córdoba neighbourhood, the Sarmiento Park, the Ciudad Universitaria (University Campus), until we arrive at the centre of the metropolis. Finally, we go by the Chateau Carreras Stadium and other attractions. After finishing this circuit, we return to the hotel.



day
14

Calamuchita Valley

Breakfast at the hotel. We set off to the Calamuchita Valley, towards the city of Alta Gracia, 35km away from the provincial capital. Alta Gracia is located on the Paravachasca Valley, it is a mainly touristic site where there used to be a Jesuit ranch. Once we arrive, we visit the Museo Estancia Jesuítica (Jesuit Ranch Museum) and Viceroy Liniers's House built in 1588, the characteristic Tajamar, also built by the Jesuits in 1643 as a water reserve for watering crops which ended forming a lake.

The journey continues on a route that goes through the mountain towns along the valley like Anisacate, Villa La Bolsa, La Serranita, Villa Ciudad de América, and following this attractive mountain road we arrive at the Dique Los Molinos (Los Molinos Dam). We continue with the itinerary to Villa General Belgrano, located on the Calamuchita Valley. The Bavarian architecture is typical here due to the mostly German immigration as well as Swiss, Italian and Austrian. The natural environment is really beautiful, with coniferous and oak forests together with streams which define the mountain landscape. We return to Córdoba City in the afternoon.

day
15

The route of the Jesuít Estancias

Breakfast in the hotel. We leave early to start this trip by the Córdoba roads to the town of Jesús María following the same route as the old Camino Real to Alta Perú. There we visit the Jesuít museum, a 17th century Jesuít Estancia, and go on to see the Doma and Folklore Amphitheatre and Colonia Caroya, a town of Italian immigrants that are famous for their making of sausages and preserves. Also we enter the Casa Caroya, where operated the first manufacturer of swords and knives that dates back to the beginning of the 19th century. At this house stayed General Belgrano and General José Don de San Martín, fathers of the Republic. After, we go to the church and the Estancia Catalina and on to the locality of Ascochinga. Continuing in the direction south we pass El Manzano, Salsipuedes and the River Ceballos. Finally we make our way back to Córdoba.

In the middle of 2000, UNESCO recommended to name the Camino de las Estancias and la Manzana Jesuítica de Córdoba as Patrimony to Humanity. The monuments that we see in this trip show the origins, progression and consolidation of the work of the Compañía de Jesús in all South America. All their architectural works are true testimony to their socio-economic, cultural and religious system that operated in Córdoba for more than 200 years. In Córdoba the works consist of La Manzana Jesuítica de Córdoba in conjunction with the church of la Compañía de Jesús, the Rectory of the Universidad Nacional and the Colegio Monserrat. But in the Camino de las Estancias we find other works that form part of this system such as the Estancia Catalina, La Capilla de Candonga, La Casa del Virrey Liniers (Ex-Estancia de Alta Gracia) and the Estancia de la Candelaria. The contextual systems such as these can only be seen in one place outside of Córdoba and that is in the Jesuít Missions in the province of Misiones. Their territorial system has to this day conserved its integrity and was fundamental in the structure and maintenance of the Spanish cultural organisation in South America.



Córdoba

Breakfast at the Hotel. Transfer to Cordoba International Airport. End of program.

End of our services.