

Getting to Know “Argentina”

Argentina is the second largest country in Latin America and occupies most of the southern portion of the South American continent. It is bordered by five countries—Chile to the west (with which it shares the island of TIERRA DEL FUEGO), Bolivia and Paraguay to the north, and Brazil and Uruguay to the north-east. On its east and south, Argentina has an extensive Atlantic coastline.

Its north-south length is about 3,500 km (2,175 mi), and its greatest width is about 1,400 km (870 mi). Argentina is the third most populous country in Latin America (after Brazil and Mexico), containing about 7% of that region's total population. A plan to move the capital from BUENOS AIRES to Viedma-Carmen de Patagones was approved by Congress in 1987 but indefinitely suspended in 1990.

Argentina is one of the more highly developed countries in the Western Hemisphere. Its economy has gradually shifted from an exclusive dependence on the large-scale production of livestock and agricultural goods to one in which the industrial and service sectors are now dominant.

Since the 1950s, it has been one of the world's principal trading nations.

LAND AND RESOURCES

Physical Regions

Argentina is primarily a country of lowlands, although the ANDES, which occupy its western periphery, rise to an elevation of 6,960 m (22,834 ft) in the peak of ACONCAGUA, the highest point in the Western Hemisphere.

Soils

The soils of the Pampas are among the richest in the world and consist of a deep accumulation of loose, wind-blown materials (LOESS), resting upon granite and other ancient crystalline rock, entirely free of stones. The country's less productive soils range from laterite in the north to desert sands and sierozems in the west and south.

Climate

Most of Argentina has a temperate climate, although there is considerable variation.

Drainage

Argentine streams form five great river systems, all of which drain eastward into the Atlantic Ocean. The largest of these is the Parana, Paraguay, and Uruguay system in the north, which empties into the RIO DE LA PLATA estuary. All these rivers are more or less navigable.

Vegetation and Animal Life

Because the climates and soils are diverse, Argentina has a wide variety of vegetation. With their cold, dry climate, Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego have few trees and are covered by low shrubs and grasses. The less arid Pampas constitute South America's largest area of grassland. The Chaco region is characterized by both forests (including

Facts About Argentina

OFFICIAL NAME: Argentine Republic

LAND

Area: 2,766,889 sq km (1,068,301 sq mi).

Capital and largest city: Buenos Aires (1982 est. pop., 2,879,000).

Elevations: Highest—Aconcagua, 6,960 m (22,834 ft); lowest—sea level, along the coast.

PEOPLE

Population: 32,901,234; 11.7 persons per sq km (30.4 per sq mi).

Distribution: 86.2% urban, 13.8% rural.

Annual growth: 1.1%.

Official language: Spanish.

Major religion: Roman Catholicism.

ECONOMY

GDP (1991 est.): \$101.2 billion; \$3,100 per capita.

Labor distribution: services—57.5%; industry—30.5%; agriculture—12%.

Foreign trade: imports—\$8 billion; exports—\$12 billion; principal trade partners—United States, Brazil, Germany, Japan, Netherlands.

Currency: 1 peso = 100 centavos.

GOVERNMENT

Type: republic.

Legislature: Congress.

Political subdivisions: 23 provinces, 1 federal district, 1 national territory.

COMMUNICATIONS

Railroads (1988): 39,738 km (24,692 mi) total.

Roads (1988): 208,350 km (129,463 mi), 23% paved.

Major ports: 7.

Major airfields: 10.

quebracho and carob trees) and savanna.

Resources

Argentina has a varied base of mineral deposits, but most are small and are in remote regions of the Andes or Patagonia. Petroleum is the only mineral produced in a substantial quantity, and about 21 million metric tons (over 23 million U.S. tons) are extracted each year, making Argentina nearly self-sufficient in liquid fuels.

PEOPLE

Most Argentinians are descendants of either the Spaniards who settled in the 16th century or the millions of European immigrants who arrived in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The mestizo (mixed Indian and European) and Indian populations, once a majority, have been absorbed into the general population, and as a distinct ethnic group now number only about 30,000. Blacks were originally brought in as slaves, but as a separate racial group have virtually disappeared.

Language

Spanish is both the official and the popular language. It is, however, a distinctly Argentine Spanish, characterized by expressions and pronunciation that have evolved over more than 350 years. A dialect called Spanish Lunfardo, which developed in Buenos Aires before 1900, with many borrowed words from Italian and Portuguese, has had a significant impact on the capital. Bilingualism among immigrants and their descendants is considerable. Indian languages, including Guarani, Quechua, and Tehuelche, are spoken by only about 1 person in 1,000.

Religion

In the early 1980s approximately 90% of the people identified themselves as Catholics, 2% as Protestants, and 2% as Jewish. Freedom of worship is guaranteed by the constitution, but the Roman Catholic church is recognized as the established church and the president and vice-president must belong to it.

DEMOGRAPHY

Education and Health

Argentina's literacy rate is more than 90%. Free compulsory education ensures that the great majority of people go through elementary schools. Large numbers (40%) enter secondary schools, but only 8% graduate. The University of Buenos Aires, has more than 100,000 students. There are 21 other national universities and 18 private universities located in Argentina. Argentinians have a life expectancy of 70 years, and medical facilities (especially urban) are generally excellent.

Cultural Activities

Argentina has long been noted for the high quality of its intellectual life and for its many artistic influences. Among its modern literary figures of international reputation are Jorge Luis BORGES, Julio CORTAZAR, and Manuel PUIG. (See also LATIN AMERICAN LITERATURE.)

ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

Foreign trade and commerce have been major components of the country's economy since the time of colonization. Over the three centuries since colonization several, sometimes overlapping, economic periods can be distinguished.

Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishing

Argentina ranks among the



world's top dozen producers of wheat, rye, maize (corn), and linseed. Livestock production is also among the highest. The cattle herd numbers about 55,000,000 head, the sheep herd about 30,000,000. Hogs number about 4,650,000. In addition to meat, hides and skins and wool are the major trade commodities.

About 60% of Argentina's land area is used for agriculture. About half of all farms are privately owned; the rest are mostly in corporate, cooperative, state, or institutional ownership.

Transportation

Argentina has the most extensive transportation system in Latin America. In 1988, railroad track had a total length of about 39,738 km (24,692 mi). Highways in 1988 totaled 208,350 km (124,463 mi), but only about one-quarter was paved. Buenos Aires is the focus of the transport network.

GOVERNMENT

Argentina is a federal republic made up of 23 provinces, one territory, and the federal capital. The country is governed under the constitution of 1853, with amendments. During much of the period since 1930, however, Argentina has often been ruled by military governments that have suspended many constitutional provisions. Congress consists of two chambers, a Senate and a Chamber of Deputies. Members of the Chamber of Deputies serve 4-year terms and members of the Senate, 9-year terms. The president serves a 6-year term but cannot serve two consecutive terms.

HISTORY

At the beginning of the 16th century, before the arrival of Europeans, the area that is now Argentina had a population of about 300,000, mostly nomadic Indians.

Colonization

In 1516 the Spaniard Juan Diaz de Solis, in search of a southwest passage to the Orient, became the first European to set foot on Argentine territory. Buenos Aires was originally founded in 1536 by Pedro de MENDOZA, but because of Indian attacks was abandoned within a few years in favor of Asuncion, Paraguay. From about the mid-16th century to about 1700, Spanish colonists moved in from the Pacific coast over the Andes, founding such cities as Santiago del Estero (1553), Mendoza (1561), San Juan (1562), TUCUMAN (1565), Cordoba (1573), Salta (1582), La Rioja (1591), and San Luis (1596). The pattern of settlement, from west to east, was opposite to that of the United States.

After Buenos Aires was permanently resettled in 1580, it gradually began to reap the benefits of its advantageous location as both an east-coast port and as a buffer to the southward expansion of the Portuguese colony of Brazil.

Independence

In 1806, during the Napoleonic Wars, Buenos Aires was occupied by the British. Although the colonial militia led by Jacques de Liniers (1753-1810) restored Spanish rule, Spain's ties with its American colonies were weakened in the tumultuous period, especially after

Napoleon's deposition of Ferdinand VII. Independence was followed by almost continuous civil war. Conflict developed between the centralists (or unitarians), who favored a strongly centralized government at Buenos Aires, and the federalists, who, with the support of gaucho troops, supported provincial autonomy. The federalist Juan Manuel de ROSAS, governor of Buenos Aires, consolidated his power to rule as virtual dictator of the country from 1835 to 1852 and managed to preserve a national unity. Following his overthrow, the present constitution was adopted (1853), but it was not until 1862 that Buenos Aires became a fully integrated province in the federal structure provided for by the constitution.

Economic Expansion

Despite intermittent uprisings and periods of anarchy in the 19th century, much economic progress was made. During the administrations of presidents Bartolome MITRE (1862-68) and Domingo SARMIENTO (1868-74) immigration was encouraged, a public education system established, railroads built, and better breeds of cattle and sheep introduced. Gen. Julio ROCA (president 1880-86, 1898-1904) achieved a final victory over the Indians in 1879, opening the Pampas to settlement.

In 1916 the Radical candidate Hipolito Irigoyen (c. 1850-1933) became the first Argentine president to be elected by popular vote. Irigoyen continued Argentina's policy of neutrality in World War I.

Argentina gives back to Indians

Argentina has restored more than 300,000 acres of ancestral land to a small community of Colla Indians who have been holding annual marches to the capital for more than 50 years to press their claims.

President Carlos Menem officially presented the land to the 3,000 Indians during a ceremony Wednesday. About 50 Indians at-

tended, dressed in bright red ponchos.

"This is the recognition of their authentic rights to the land," Menem said.

The land is in the province of Salta, 1,000 miles northwest of Buenos Aires, the capital.

The Colla Indians first marched to the capital in 1946 to meet with then-President Juan Peron and de-

mand rights to the land, which was seized by Spanish conquistadors in 1580. They have since made annual trips to the capital.

Other Indian groups also have demanded the return of land taken by the Spanish. Including the Colla land, the government has now given back nearly 4 million acres of indigenous land, and has pledged to return another 1 million by 2000.

Mexico vows drug cooperation

Mexico's new drug czar said Thursday he is working to overhaul the country's top narcotics-fighting agency - including having drug tests for employees - after his predecessor's arrest over alleged links to a cocaine smuggler.

Mariano Herran Salvatti said those working for the National Institute to Fight Drugs will be subject to close scrutiny under a wider plan to weed out corruption throughout federal law enforcement agencies.

He said a "personnel review" of federal crime fighters was under way.

"I would like to emphasize that we are going to proceed case by case. All will be subject to the same examinations," Herran Salvatti told a news conference.

This week alone, the attorney

general's office found that 424 employees of its federal crime-fighting agencies had tested positive for drugs, about half of those for cocaine use.

Herran Salvatti himself submitted to drug, psychological and proficiency tests and an audit of his personal finances before being named head of the institute. He said from now on all new hires must submit to the same tests - something unheard of up to now in the federal government.

He also said Mexico's attorney general would lead a commission set up to recommend and oversee reforms.

Previously Mexico City's chief prosecutor, the 48-year-old civilian lawyer was tapped this month to replace Jesus Gutierrez Rebollo, an

army general ousted in February as drug czar on charges of being in the pay of a top trafficker.

At his swearing-in, Herran Salvatti said the his biggest challenge would be "recovering the confidence lost and damaged by corruption, impunity and the irresponsible actions of many bad public servants over many years."

Until Gutierrez Rebollo's Feb. 18 arrest, Mexico was a shoo-in for re-certification as a cooperating ally of the U.S. war on drugs. After it, President Clinton re-certified Mexico amid an uproar in the U.S. House.

But after intense negotiations with the Clinton administration, the U.S. Senate approved a resolution that ends any chance for Congress to overturn the presidential OK of Mexico's anti-drug efforts.

La semana santa

Se acerca de nuevo una de las más veneradas fechas en las culturas con arraigo católicos. En muchos países de Latinoamérica la Semana Santa, es el tiempo ideal en que muchas personas deciden volverse más católicos que nunca, siguiendo todos los mandatos que esta semana impone con el ferviente deseo de ser perdonados por todos los pecados cometidos y ser purificado. Sin lugar a dudas este es el tiempo también de arrodillarse y pedir por la resolución de todos sus problemas y más aún, pedir por la realización de sus sueños acariciados sean cristalizados en un clara y nítida

realidad.

La Semana Santa es también tiempo para renovarse como persona, para acercarse al Cristo el cual dio la vida y sufrió por todos nosotros. La repetición una y otra vez del calvario de Cristo se demuestra en las diferentes formas en que los católicos muestran su veneración, no sólo al Cristo sino también a la Virgen María.

La Semana Santa siempre llega con un renovación de la esperanza y la fe de aquellos a quienes la viven con intensidad y regocijo. Los diferentes matices que pueblos y países le dan a esta particular Semana Santa varía de pendiendo de las

tradiciones de cada lugar y de la devoción que cada pueblo o país le concede a esta tan especial celebración. Estas demostraciones van desde la manera comer, celebrar, y departir con familiares vecinos y por supuesto por esa necesidad de sentirse cerca del Cristo salvador.

Lo más importante de esta La Semana Santa sobre todo es la cercanía que la gente siente hacia lo santo, lo sagrado, el semtoimiento de cercanía con lo celestial y con el Cristo que lo dio todo por nosotros y por el cual estamos dispuestos a cambiar y ser más humanos, más católicos, aunque en algunos casos sólo sea por una semana.

Latinos decry representation

Armed with a government report showing Latinos as the most under-represented group in the federal civilian work force, Latino leaders say President Clinton hasn't shared the spoils of his re-election victory with them.

"The president has said he wants government to reflect America. It doesn't," Rep. Xavier Becerra, D-Calif., chairman of the 17-member Congressional Hispanic Caucus, said Thursday. "We've been moving backwards when it comes to diversity."

At a news conference called by Becerra and representatives from several Latino advocacy, a recently completed Government Accounting Office study was cited to underscore the contention. It said that while Hispanics constitute 10 percent of the population, they account for less than 6 percent of the civilians employed by the federal government.

Among 17 departments studied, the Commerce Department, with 2.1 percent, had the lowest proportion of Hispanics. The Air Force had the highest share, 5.1 percent.

Latinos represent less than 6 percent of total political appointments compared with almost 8 percent before Clinton's re-election, Becerra said. Since Latinos gave Clinton 72 percent of their votes, they should be better represented in his administration, said Raul Yzaguirre, president of the National Council of La Raza, the largest political group of Latinos.

"The community has now mobilized to insist that the administration treat us with commensurate fairness and respect," he said.