

Golf in Buenos Aires

When countryman Angel Cabrera put on the green jacket at this year's US Masters, Argentinean golf found itself in the spotlight. Add the fact that Buenos Aires will host the next Eisenhower Cup in 2010 and flights from the east coast of Australia have never been cheaper (currently around \$1100 including tax), golf tourism is predicted to boom.

ChrisCanty

Buenos Aires is a city that has never struggled to attract visitors. With its classic European architecture, a blind devotion to all things football and an easy blend of tango houses and steak restaurants, the "Paris of South America" is an ideal starting point for those new to the continent.

But while the city continues to win plaudits from global travel media, its status as a great golfing destination, with world class golf courses dotted around the city, is often overlooked.

San Andrés Golf Course

San Andrés (Saint Andrews) was founded in 1892 and is the oldest golf club in Argentina. Its present location,

just 30 minutes from downtown BA, was founded in 1907 and over the years has reached such prominence that the town around the club has adopted the same name. A train station was also especially built for golfers to enable easy access. It has hosted the Argentinean Open 21 times, and has the 1967 British Open champion and BA's own **Roberto De Vincenzo**, as an honorary member.

Designed by the Scottish professional Mr Mungo Park, the course has an English woodland type feel, where a differing array of grand high trees border thin fairways on nearly every hole. The course is very flat, and the deep rough punishes those that don't drive straight. Often finding my ball 3 metres off the fairway meant no chance in reaching the green in

regulation. Putting surfaces are quite slow and can be forgiving and the water hazard next to the clubhouse doesn't really come into play if you're smart, slighting affecting the opening and closing holes. Especially quaint is the pedestrian path running through the course where local workers often stop and watch you play your shot. Overall it's a course that rewards absolute precision off the tee.

Pilar Golf Course

Located 50 minutes away from downtown in the affluent suburb of Pilar, sits this 27-hole US-style resort links course. Water features predominantly on many of the holes and with an out of bounds seemingly always nearby, losing balls is easy.

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Pilar Golf Club, home of the only par 6 in South America

Electric buggies are compulsory and are fitted with the latest GPS technology giving exact yardage on your onboard display, as well as green undulations and features of each hole. It even tells you if you should play faster because of slow play. Highlights include a number of huge double greens and **the only par 6 in South America** on the 553 metre 9th hole (red course). Here you must decide to either lay up before the water hazard from the tee or take it on. I took it on and got wet, hitting my first ever "double bogey 8". An enormous clubhouse sits high above the course and features a London Pub style restaurant.

The Jockey Club

Renowned as one of the most prestigious golf courses in Argentina, the Jockey Club was designed by **Alistair Mackenzie** in 1928. He also designed Augusta National, Cypress Point, Crystal Downs



The Alistair Mackenzie-designed Jockey Club

and Australia's own Royal Melbourne and is considered one of the world's greatest course designers. It has also hosted all-time greats of the game including Sam Snead, Arnold Palmer and Bobby Jones. The European Tour sanctioned Argentine Open, one of the oldest national golf

“Highlights include a number of huge double greens and the only par 6 in South America”

championships, was won by Angel Cabrera here in 2001.

Situated in the picturesque suburb of San Isidro, 20 minutes from downtown, the

Jockey Club consists of two 18-hole courses, the Canca Colorado (6037 metres) and the Azul (5695 metres). The courses are known for their narrow

sculptured fairways, deep rough and high trees, ready to capture any wayward ball. Mackenzie's signature contoured greens means it is very important to hit the greens in the correct spot to avoid 3-putt or even 4-putt territory. A classic English style clubhouse with tailored waiters is ideal for those 19th hole refreshments.

Olivos Golf Course

Founded in 1926, the Olivos GC consists of 27 holes and is considered one of the best golf courses in all of South America. Located 30 minutes from downtown, like other courses made at the time it has a distinctly English feel, with thin protected

fairways and challenging large greens. On some holes it feels as if you have to drive through an eye of a needle just to miss the overhanging branches of the trees.

A signature of the course is its frequent doglegs meaning you will often have to leave the driver in the bag on some holes and play smart using irons off the tee. Add the many bunkers, occasional water hazards (a scenic lake comes into play on the 15th and 16th) and an out of bounds that is too close for comfort on some holes, you'll encounter a challenging day's play.

The course will also co-host the next **Eisenhower cup** (amateur world championships) in 2010. ◀

Getting There:

Patagonia Golf is a specialist golf tour operator that offers a "Golf in Buenos Aires" package to these courses. Details on this package and other tailor made tours around BA and beyond can be found at www.patagoniagolf.com

Eating out:

No trip to BA is complete without getting a taste of Argentinean beef, which is commonly regarded and rightfully so as the world's best. A great culinary option for meat lovers is **El Desnivel**, deep in the heart of San Telmo, BA's oldest suburb. This classic old school restaurant always has a jovial atmosphere and the portions are large, the quality is excellent and the waiters are cheekily entertaining. I recommend the bife de lomo (loin of beef) which is incredibly succulent and costs just \$13. If you want to go where the locals are, **Avenue Carlos M. Noel** is a 2 kilometre pedestrian strip where mobile

parillas (bbq vans) offer an incredibly cheap and delicious array of pork, chorizo sausage and beef. Nothing is over \$5. For something unique **Casa Felix** (www.diegofelix.com) is a closed door restaurant (a private restaurant in the chef's home) and specializes in great vegetarian and indigenous cuisine.

Catch a game of football:

In Buenos Aires, football is far more than just a game, where wearing the wrong colours in certain parts of the city can be downright dangerous. Truly one of the most exhilarating sporting experiences in the world is watching Maradona's old side Boca Juniors play at the Bombonera (the chocolate box) stadium. To get the real cheap tickets you can queue up at the stadium on the morning of the game, though at the game you'll be standing next to the die-hard supporters where anything goes (hint: wear a rain coat because unidentifiable liquids are often thrown from the opposition supporters).



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