

ONE DAY, ONE PLACE



Yvonne Gordon / Special to The Chronicle

There is no shortage of hip sidewalk cafes to choose from to try colorful dishes and watch the world go by in the Palermo Soho neighborhood of Buenos Aires.

BUENOS AIRES

Exploring in hip, vibrant Palermo

Argentina's largest city, Buenos Aires is buzzing with energy, with a hip nightlife, theater, cafe and dining scene, as well as tango dancing, street markets, parks and museums to keep visitors and locals entertained.

The city is divided into districts or barrios, and Palermo in the northeast is the largest and one of the liveliest, with lots of green spaces, museums, galleries and theaters as well as charming wide, tree-lined streets with old, single-story Spanish-style houses.

Palermo itself is divided into smaller neighborhoods, and Palermo Soho and Palermo Hollywood are where you'll find artists, musicians, designers and other creative porteños sipping coffee or cocktails at interesting cafes, bars or even bookshops, many of which double as cafes. The area is also known for its street art — colorful murals often done by graphic designers and classically trained artists.

Here's how to spend the perfect day in Buenos Aires' hippest hood.

— Yvonne Gordon, travel@sfcchronicle.com

MORNING

If you're exploring a hip area, then you'll need a stylish base to explore from like Home Hotel in Palermo Hollywood. Set up by a British record producer and his Argentine wife, this boutique hotel has quirky design features such as a wood wall, vintage French wallpaper and 1950s Scandinavian furniture, salvaged from flea markets. Tables full of books and a CD library in the reception area add to a homey feel. Start the day with breakfast on the deck near the pool garden — you might meet the friendly house cat, Mulata, too.

Palermo is easily walkable, so get your bearings and see the area's best street art on a three-hour tour with Graffiti Mundo, which started the world's first street-art tours back in 2008. Buenos Aires has had a mixed history, and many areas of the city are home to large, colorful murals. This tour of Palermo and the nearby Colegiales area gives insight into the social and political movements behind some of the area's iconic street-art pieces and how street-art collectives formed to make statements and put color back into the streets after the 1998 crash. Graffiti Mundo will explain the different artists, their materials (one makes pigment using tar and gasoline), signature features and trends in the street-art movement and its context in social history.



Krzysztof Dydynski / Getty Images

Professional dog walkers in Buenos Aires are noted for how impressively well-behaved their charges are.

MIDDAY

Time to grab a table at a sidewalk and watch the world go by over a cafe cortado, lunch or weekend brunch — perhaps at Birkin Café, which has a quirky tea menu (dulce de leche flavored rooibos, anyone?) and colorful dishes like beetroot hummus, Nordic brunch or Japanese-style steak tataki, all of which you'll probably want to Instagram before eating (note, the cafe is cash or debit card, no credit cards).

While here, you might spot one of Buenos Aires' famous dog walkers passing by — professional walkers who collect up to 14 pooches a day one by one from their different Palermo addresses, for their daily exercise and run in the park. What's impressive is how well behaved the dogs usually are, walking in perfect sync for their human leader of the pack.

AFTERNOON

On a weekend day, drop into the open air market at Plaza Serrano in Palermo Soho, which offers everything from arts and crafts to fashion. Shops around the square sell funky clothes and accessories, while the market stalls themselves have lots of crafts, art and handmade bags, jewelry and cloth toys. There are plenty of bars and restaurants around the square too for refreshments. For weekday shopping, browse the shops around Jorge Luis Borges and Gurruchaga streets.

EVENING

With your appetite worked up, it's time to hit one of the neighborhood's iconic parrillas (steak houses) for a big beefy Argentine steak. A local favorite is La Carnicería in Palermo Soho, a tiny spot that gives traditional dishes like chorizo a twist, serving it with potatoes, mashed peas and fried egg, or homemade blood sausage with apple and pepper. Steak mains include smoked cuts, pork cuts and boar with carrot, anise and beet. This is a tiny place with two sittings — 8 and 10.30 p.m. — so book well in advance (no walk-ins). Finish with a cocktail in one of the bars along Honduras or Gorriti on the way back to home.

IF YOU GO

- Home Hotel:**
Honduras 5860,
www.homebuenosaires.com
- Graffiti Mundo:**
0054 911 3683
3219, www.grafitimundo.com.
(Tours of Palermo every Tuesday and Thursday at 5 p.m. or mornings by arrangement.)
- Birkin Café:**
Nicaragua 6025,
www.facebook.com/birkincafe
- Plaza Serrano market:** Saturdays and Sundays, noon to 6 p.m.
- La Carnicería:**
Thames 2317,
+54 11 2071-7199,
www.facebook.com/xlacar niceriax

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