

ARGENTINA

THE LAND

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THE NAME “ARGENTINA”

The name “Argentina” comes from the latin “argentum” which means silver. The origin of the name goes back to the voyages made by the first Spanish conquistadors (conquerors) to the Rio de la Plata (Silver River). The shipwrecked survivors of the expedition mounted by Juan Diaz de Solis discovered indians in the region who presented them with silver objects. The news about the legendary Sierra del Plata, a mountain rich in silver, reached Spain around 1524. From this date the Portuguese named the river Solis, the Silver River. Two years later the Spanish used the same name. Since 1860 the official name of the country has been the Republica Argentina (Republic of Argentina).

LOCATION, AREA AND FRONTIERS

Located in the southern part of South America and thus in the southern hemisphere, Argentina has an area of almost 3.8 million square kilometres, of which 2.8 are on the continent and the remain in the Antarctic. It's length of 3800 kms goes from latitude 22 degrees to 55 degrees. It's frontier with Uruguay, Brazil, Paraguay, Bolivia and Chile has a perimeter of 9.376 kms and the coast, on the Atlantic Ocean, is 5.117 kms long.

SOME GEOGRAPHY

The fundamental characteristic of Argentina is the enormous contrast between the immense eastern plains and the imposing mountain range of the Andes to the west. This is the frontier with Chile and has the highest peak in the west, the Aconcagua, 6 959 metres long.

In it's passage from Jujuy to Tierra del Fuego the range presents marvellous contrasts, the plateaus of the nortwest, the lake region, the forest and the glaciers of the Patagonian Andes.

To the north, Chaco is a forested area which follows the rivers Bermejo, Sabado and Pilcomayo. Between the Parana and Uruguay, the Mesopotamia Argentina (the provinces of Entre Rios, Corrientes and Misiones) is formed by low hills where pools and marshlands show the ancient courses of these great rivers.

Occasionally there are fissures which provide such spectacular phenomena as the Falls of Iguazu.

La Pampa, in the centre of Argentina, is the largest and best known area of plains. It has a large amount of agriculture and livestock and includes the provinces of Buenos Aires, La Pampa, the south of Santa Fe and the east of Cordoba. It's landscape is broken to the south by the small mountains of Tandil and La Ventana and to the west by the Cordoba mountain ranges.

Towards the south, from the Andes to the sea, are the sterile and stony plateaus of Patagonia, swept by the wind during most of the year. The Atlantic coast, lined with high cliffs, forms massive indentations like the Valdes Peninsula, with its spectacular and unique colonies of marine animals.

POPULATION

The current population of Argentina is estimated to be some 36 million of which almost half live in the Federal Capital and the province of Buenos Aires. These figures give us a population density of 12.9 inhabitants per square kilometre. 95 % of Argentineans are white and principally descendants of Italians and Spaniards. With the massive European immigration, the white and Indian half castes became slowly diluted until today these people only amount to 4.5 % of the population. The pure indigenous population, the Mapuches, Collas, Tobas, Matacos and Chiriguano amount to 0.5 % of the population.

LANGUAGE

Spanish is the official language of the Argentine Republic. In Buenos Aires forms of lunfardo, which is a city lang, are used. In some areas guarani, quechua, aymara and the native tongues of the indigenous minority are spoken.

RELIGION

There is a complete religion freedom in Argentina although the official one is Roman Catholic. There are also other religions such as Protestant, Jewish, Moslem, Greek Orthodox, Russian Orthodox, etc.

CURRENCY

The official Argentine currency is the Peso which is on a par with the US dollar and fluctuates with it. There are notes of 1, 2, 5, 10, 20, 50, and 100 pesos and coins of 1, 2 and 5 pesos, and 1, 5, 10, 25 and 50 centavos.

GOVERNMENT AND CONSTITUTION

The country is a representative federal and democratic republic with Buenos Aires as the Federal Capital and 23 provinces.

There are three authorities: the executive, the legislative and the judicial. The first is exercised by the President of the Nation elected for a term of four years. He has ample powers, including the power of approving or vetoing decisions by Congress. The National Congress has two chambers. The Chamber of Deputies has 254 directly elected members. The Senate has 72 members elected by provincial jurisdictions, three per province and three for the Federal Capital. The provinces are autonomous and elect their own officials, the Governor being the ultimate authority.

The current constitution dates from 1853. Nevertheless, it has undergone changes on various occasions, the last time was in August 1994, which allowed the reelection of the President of the Nation for one more term.

TWO HISTORIC DATES

25th of May 1810. The first Government independent of the Kingdom of Spain was constituted.

9th of July 1816. Proclamation of Independence by the United Provinces of the Silver River. Birth of the Republic of Argentina.