

ARGENTINA

“The colour, vibrancy, music and Argentinian culture leave you breathless. My life completely changed while on a year-long exchange with AFS. The Argentinian people and lifestyle taught me about the kind of person I want to be, and the type of life I want to lead. It was an absolutely incredible experience, which will remain with me always. “I gained patriotism for a country and love for a people that I never understood realistically existed before 1999. I experienced friendship so strong it surpasses all distance, and a sense of family, as if I was born to it. This is just a small part of why my exchange year in Argentina was absolutely by far the most special and memorable year of my life.” I would highly recommend an AFS exchange to anybody who has a love for life, knowledge, beauty and humanity, or wishes to leap out of your comfort zone and truly live.” **Vanessa Evetts, sojourner from New Zealand, 1999-2000**

Europe’s influence is strong in Argentina, from the Continental urbanity of Buenos Aires to the nation’s passion for soccer and the aspiration of many Argentines to educate their children in Europe. Yet Argentina has a vigorous identity of its own. Its schools foster an erudite and sophisticated citizenry, and its culture has nurtured such celebrated writers as Borges, Puig and Cortázar. Argentine music, too—from tangos to “rock nacional”—is world-class. As for natural wonders, the nation’s territorial sweep ranges from titanic Iguazú Falls in the steamy northeastern rainforest to glacier-topped mountains and penguin colonies in the south.

AFS & Your Experience

AFS Argentina has been in existence since 1955. AFS volunteers, divided into 43 chapters across the country, provide support to more than 180 AFS students and about 30 community service participants every year.

Landing in Argentina

You will arrive in Ezeiza, the airport just outside Buenos Aires, the capital of Argentina. AFS staff and volunteers will then bring you to the first orientation at a convention Center in the outskirts of Buenos Aires.

Arrival Orientation

A two-to-three day arrival orientation will introduce you to the country and the AFS organization in Argentina. But you will also enjoy some games, workshops, a talent show and a city tour of Buenos Aires before travelling to meet your host family. Students placed less than 1200 km from Buenos Aires will travel by bus, and those placed in communities located more than 1200 km away will travel by plane.

Living in Argentina

Lifestyle and Family Living

Argentina’s population is prevalently of European heritage. Family life plays a central role in the social structure of Argentina. Families tend to be close-knit with grandparents often living at home and many extended family members always nearby. Argentines are generally sociable people who value courtesy and respect, especially toward their elders. Lunch and dinner are important family meeting times. Argentine families are protective of their children (parents expect to know when and where their children are going out) and will not lack warmth and spontaneous shows of affection.

Argentine host families, like all AFS host families worldwide, are not paid. They open their homes to students in order to share their community and culture as well as to enrich their own family life. They are very respectful and, although Argentina is a strongly Catholic country, families and society welcome people of other beliefs. Many people smoke in Argentina and, while it may be common to have someone in the house who smokes, families strongly prefer that their children not do so.

Both parents generally work, although they probably come home for lunch and a quick nap, or *siesta*. Lifestyles may vary, especially in Buenos Aires where of course they are as diverse as in any big metropolis.

You may be placed in any region of Argentina, from the southernmost province of Tierra del Fuego, to downtown Buenos Aires. Most placements are with middle-class families and are commonly in small to big cities from 10,000 to 3,000,000 inhabitants (95%: 60% suburban, 35% urban). Very few students are placed in rural areas (5%).

Dress and Appearance

Argentine teenagers like to dress casually (i.e. jeans and T-shirts) but are also careful about fashion. Shorts are very popular during the summer. You should also pack some warm clothes (jacket, gloves, scarf, boots) because, despite the myth that Argentina is a tropical country, the winter can be cold (from June to September). You should think about bringing one or two nice outfits (shirts and ties for men, dresses for women) for special occasions. Cleanliness is valued; taking a shower every day is very important and, due to a somewhat conservative dressing style, earrings on men and other non-traditional looks are not always well accepted.

Diet and Meals

As Argentina is a great (and proud) cattle-raising country, meat—which means mainly beef to Argentines—is a base of the Argentine diet. Therefore vegetarians are sometimes difficult to place. *Parillada* (mixed grills of all parts and cuts of cow) are very popular, especially during social gatherings. *Milanesas* (breaded fried cutlet) or *bife* (grilled steak) are other popular dishes that reveal the strong influence of Italians, who are more likely to be considered part of the Argentine heritage rather than a minority. Other examples of Italian influence are the gnocchi (*ñoquis*), which will be eaten traditionally on the 29th of every month for good luck, or the highly popular Argentine gelato (*helado*.) *Guiso* (rice or pasta with vegetable and meat sauce) is a common winter meal.

In addition to their high consumption of beef and pastas, Argentines are also known to be great consumers of *mate* (local green tea). This is more a socializing element than a beverage served with a meal: *mate* is shared among people during any kind of gathering and the special gourd it comes in is offered from person to person.

Meals carry strong social significance, and whole families customarily eat together. It is considered inappropriate for individuals to request special foods, to prepare separate food for themselves or to raid the refrigerator, although your appreciation of and request for some particular dishes will be happily received.

School

In Argentina, school is one of the best places to meet people and make friends. The school system has seven years of elementary school and five of high school. The school year starts in mid-March and ends in early December, with a two-week winter vacation in July. The school year is divided into two semesters with verifications and exams every three months. You will attend classes Monday through Friday either in the morning (from 7 a.m. to 12 p.m.) or in the afternoon (1 p.m. to 6 p.m.), not both, depending on the school. Teachers change rooms while you will remain with your classmates.

Argentina has both public and private schools. They may be academic, vocational-commercial or vocational-technical. Most AFSers are placed in public coeducational schools in the fourth or fifth year (last or second-to-last year) with classmates ages 16 and 17. Most schools require uniforms (you should bring approximately US\$100 to cover the cost).

You will be required to take up to 11 core subjects with Spanish (*Castellano*), Spanish or Argentine literature, geography, biology, foreign language and math as compulsory and various other subjects depending on the school and the scholastic focus chosen (such as humanities, technical-business, industrial or pedagogical).

You can obtain a transcript and/or a certificate of attendance if you attend classes regularly, complete the course work and pass the examinations. But this may vary from province to province; some provinces are reluctant to extend a certificate to AFS participants.

Extracurricular activities are limited mostly to sports clubs. Generally, a school will organize a class trip that you will be invited to join (the cost is usually about US\$350).

Teen Life

Having friends and a social life is very important in Argentina, and sometimes you may feel a lack of privacy, as you will spend a lot of time with your friends and schoolmates. Even personal belongings may be considered shared property. After you get home from school and have lunch with your family, you will have spare time that, in addition to studying and doing homework with your friends, you can fill with many activities. Argentines often attend a gym or other sports club (soccer is very popular) in the afternoon. Many teenagers also study a second language at a special school. But what they enjoy the most is getting together at friends' houses or in the central town square, going to parties or just hanging out in the local café. You may also be able to join other groups involved in music or arts activities. To get around teenagers generally walk, bike or, when in major cities, take public buses.

Around 8-9:30 p.m. the whole family gathers for dinner. During the weekends, Argentine teenagers enjoy going out to movies, to eat and especially to dance.

AFS Activities

In addition to an orientation at your arrival, AFS Argentina will provide you with several others. AFS orientations let participants join together (often for a weekend or for a few days) to talk about both expectations for the future program and past experiences. Orientations involve participating in group activities and self-examination. Sessions usually provide new information and ways of looking at things while also allowing participants to share points of view. AFS orientations are social, interactive and educational; they bring together young people from many countries and help them to better understand their own intercultural learning experience.

About one week after your arrival, you will participate in a regional orientation that will last for two or three days to further help you adjust. You will also be able to participate with other AFSers in a one-week regional get-together, when you will spend five days in another community. This time will allow you to catch up on friendships, ask questions and share experiences.

AFS volunteers may organize several other activities for you during your stay. These may include informal get-togethers, weekend trips and picnics. AFS Argentina may also organize a one-week short-term exchange in another city for semester students on the winter cycle. You will also be invited to join with other AFSers and volunteers in a trip to Iguazu Falls at a cost of about US\$250.

Last, but definitely not least, is the so-called End-of-Stay orientation. You will get together for a couple of days with other AFSers in your chapter a week before you return home. The "End-of-Stay" is about looking back at your exchange and sharing memories with other AFSers and thinking of the future.

Travel

Although it is natural for you to want to travel while in Argentina, AFS is not designed as a tourist program. AFS offers the rare opportunity to be immersed in a culture and a country. It is likely, however, that you will have many opportunities to travel with your host family, school, community organization, local chapter or AFS Argentina. We strongly discourage traveling on your own or with friends.

Spending Money

Host families are asked to pay only for ordinary family events in which you are expected to participate. When you do things such as shopping for yourself or going out with friends, the related expenses are your responsibility. AFS recommends that participants bring US\$100 per month for spending money.

Because traveler's checks are difficult to cash in some communities, and banks charge a high commission on money transfers, bringing some cash and a credit or debit bank card are good options. Bringing more than one-third of your money in cash is not a good idea, however. You must take precautions if you decide to use a card, as cash and cards do not offer the same protection as traveler's checks in case of loss or theft.

Young Argentines are not used to carrying or spending large amounts of money and spending more money than your peers and family may create a distance between you and them. It is wise to learn to spend as they do.

Safety and Support

Argentina is a relatively safe country. Demonstrations that brought world attention were loud and visible, but peaceful rather than unsafe, protest gatherings. In tune with the people's style and attitude, they take place primarily in politically symbolic places in the capital. Therefore you should do well if you listen to your host family's advice and follow the normal precautions you would use at home. We strongly recommend reading the "Tips for Personal Safety" material that AFS Argentina will send along with the country information.

During your stay, local AFS volunteers will be available to assist you as you learn to live as an Argentine. In the event of an emergency, AFS staff can be reached 24 hours a day by you in your host country and by your natural family at home.

For the welfare of participants, AFS worldwide has two rules: no driving and no use of drugs for non-medicinal purposes. Any student who violates either of these rules will be automatically sent home. AFS Argentina may have additional rules.

Health Precautions

In addition to the precautions mentioned above, AFS suggests that you discuss the health recommendations for Argentina (which you can get from your government or easily reach on the Internet) with your personal doctor, to determine what is best for you and your personal health needs.

If you need any medical assistance during your stay, your host family or local volunteers will be ready to help find it. As an AFS participant your medical expenses are covered for illness or accidental injuries incurred while on the program, exclusive of pre-existing, dental or visual-aid expenses.

Documents

You must have a passport that will be valid for six months longer than your intended stay. In addition to your passport, you also need a visa to enter and reside in your host country. Visas are obtained through the consular offices in your region and requirements often vary from consulate to consulate.

Consulates charge fees for their services, and obtaining your visa can be a complicated and lengthy process requiring a great deal of paperwork, patience and persistence. It is your responsibility to obtain your visa and pay the fees. However, AFS will let you know how to proceed and will provide you with the documents you need to apply for the visa.

Program Prices

All participants are required to pay participation fee **and** do a mandatory fundraising. To get further information, please visit our website www.afscanada.org or contact us.

The program price covers the following: round-trip international travel with your AFS group; travel in the host country to your host family; travel from your host family to your international departure point; AFS's medical plan; placement with your host; orientation in your home country and your host country; 24 hour emergency assistance in your home and host countries; a global medical assistance organization to support extreme emergencies; a network of trained volunteers who support you throughout your experience.

In order to keep costs low and provide good service, AFS utilizes a network of volunteers and staff in 50+ countries around the world. Volunteers need training, support and assistance from professional staff in each country. Other expenses you will normally need to pay in addition to the program price: passport and visa fees, required inoculations, expenses for eyeglasses, contacts and dental care, school uniforms (where applicable) and personal spending money. Your housing and food are provided by your host family as part of their commitment to our program.

Country Information

Geography and Climate

Argentina is the eighth largest country in the world, after India. It is best known for its fertile prairies called *pampas*, which are found in the country's central region. It occupies the majority of South America's long southern tail. In the west, bordering Chile and running north-south along the spine of the continent are the Andes Mountains, whose foothills contain beautiful valleys and canyons. In the north, Argentina borders Bolivia and Paraguay. To the east are Brazil, Uruguay and the long coastline of the southern Atlantic Ocean. It also shares with Chile the islands of Tierra del Fuego in the south.

Argentina features four major areas: *Las Pampas* in the center; lowlands in the north (subtropical rainforest), the Andes in the west (vineyards at the base and glaciers at the top) and Patagonia (an ensemble of steppes and icy areas) in the south.

Seasons are those of the southern hemisphere with summer between November and April and winter from June through August. Although the climate is generally temperate, the great north-south sweep of the country means regional climates vary from subtropical in the northern regions to sub-arctic in southern Patagonia. Therefore, you should research the climate of your host community once it is assigned.

Population

Argentina's population is 97% of European descent (mostly Spanish and Italian), with mestizo, Amerindian, and other Native American groups making up 3%. There is a substantial middle class. Buenos Aires, the capital city, has a population of 14 million and a particularly European atmosphere that differs deeply from the rest of the country, known as the *interior*.

Language

Spanish is the official language of Argentina. Reflecting the influence of its single largest immigrant group, Italian is widely understood. English, German and French are also spoken.

Government

Argentina is a federal republic made up of 24 provinces and the Federal Capital. There is an elected civilian president and a bicameral legislature, the *Congreso Nacional* (National Congress) and the *Cámara de Diputados* (Chamber of Deputies).

Religion

Argentina is a major Roman Catholic country (92% nominally; less than 20% practicing) but is very accepting of other religious groups. Major minorities are Protestant 2% and Jewish 3.5%.

Launching your AFS Experience

Evaluations by previous participants support our belief that those students who prepare themselves prior to leaving have the best experience. In order to get yourself ready, first make every effort to learn some key Spanish words and phrases so that you arrive with at least some basic knowledge of the language.

To familiarize yourself further with life in Argentina, make use of your local library and/or the Internet. General information about Argentina and its culture is plentiful.

Although each participant's experience is unique, we strongly suggest that you speak with a recent AFS participant to Argentina. This person will be an excellent resource for you regarding living life as a Argentine. If you don't know any alumni, please contact your local volunteer or AFS Interculture Canada. In addition, AFS Argentina will provide you with a special packet of country-specific information.

Argentine people will be curious about your home community. You may be surprised to find out how much they already know about your country. Therefore, it is also helpful to be as informed as possible about current events in your community and country.

Curiously Argentine

- ☀ Argentina is the home of the *tango*, considered one the most passionate dances in the world.
- ☀ Argentina is also the home of Diego Armando Maradona, the world-famous soccer player whom Argentines love to talk about, and Che Guevara, the famous revolutionary.
- ☀ The Archipelago of Tierra del Fuego, discovered in the 1520s, is said to owe its name to fires that the indigenous people would light on the coastline.
- ☀ Argentines each eat an average of 70 kg (155 pounds) of beef per year.
- ☀ Buenos Aires, Argentina, has both the widest and the largest avenues in the world: “9 de Julio” (300 meters) and “Rivadavia” (about 28 kilometres) respectively.
- ☀ Argentina has produced three Nobel Prize winners: Federico Leloir (Chemistry), Bernardo Houssay (Medicine) and Adolfo Perez Esquivel (Peace), as well as esteemed writers such as Jorge Luis Borges, Ernesto Sábato and Julio Cortázar.
- ☀ Argentines are proud of their sports stars such as Diego Maradona and Gabriel Battistuta (soccer), Gabriela Sabatini and Guillermo Vilas (tennis), José Meolans (swimming), Juan Manuel Fangio (car racing)—and also Princess Maxima, married the Prince of Holland.
- ☀ Argentina has the highest mountain in the Americas: the “Aconcagua” (6959 meters).
- ☀ Argentina shares with Uruguay the widest river on earth: “Río de la Plata.”

How to Apply?

You first have to fill out the Preliminary Application form that you can find on our website at www.afscanada.org. If you don't have access to Internet, call us at (514) 288-3282 or 1-800-361-7248 and we will send you the document by mail.

Quick Facts

Student age (upon arrival)	15 years old and 5 months to 18 years old and 6 months	
Country data	Size	2,766,890 km ² (1,079,087 mi ²)
	Population	37,812,817
	Official language	Spanish
	Government	Republic
	Currency	Peso, 100 centavos
Useful websites	www.argentina.com www.turismo.gov.ar www.lonelyplanet.com/destinations/south_america/argentina/ www.geographia.com/argentina/	
AFS Argentina website	http://www.afs.org.ar/	

Why Argentina?

- ☀ Argentines are very warm and friendly, and they love to interact with foreigners.
- ☀ Argentina is a family-based society with strong bonds between family members and relatives.
- ☀ Argentines are sociable people who frequently get together to exchange tales and life experiences, and to share meals (BBQ, *asados*).
- ☀ Argentina is a beautiful country with different regions (landscape, temperatures, beaches, mountains, etc.) that AFS can assign according to the requirements of its students.
- ☀ Food is exquisite, with a large variety of options: Argentine, French and Italian cuisine; beef, pork, fish, pasta, vegetables, mate and desserts, especially *dulce de leche* (sweet milk caramel).
- ☀ Argentina is very affordable country right now due to monetary devaluation.