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Anne Z. Cooke

Travel and adventure writer

Posted: March 23, 2011 02:58 PM

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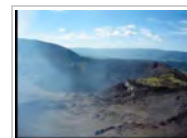
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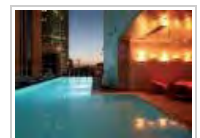
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Why "bad?" Because killer headlines get more attention. And Buenos Aires, my new favorite city, deserves it. Argentina's capital, Buenos Aires is vibrant and colorful, upbeat and stylish. For the first time since I invested in a laptop small enough to carry, I mailed a half-dozen postcards to friends at home, and even added arrows for emphasis. My first choice was the glossy photo of the Teatro Colon (the Opera House), an opulent Greek Revival structure classed among the world's top five such venues. Then, with history in mind, I penned an arrow beside the front balcony of the coral-pink Government building -- the Casa Rosada -- where Eva Peron waved to the thousands of cheering supporters who had crowded into the Plaza de Mayo to see her in person. For a genuine close-up of the Plaza, rent the movie *Evita*, and while Madonna sings "Don't Cry For Me, Argentina," look at the balcony. A ten-foot iron fence surrounds the building, but when I approached the guard at the gate he was all smiles. Lonely, I suspect, standing out there in the sun. He treasures Eva's memory, he said, grinning sheepishly. "I was here then" he said, "but I don't remember much. I was a baby in my mother's arms."



Buenos Aires' postal service must be pretty good. Those postcards reached home before I did. But you'd think I'd gone to the dark side. The first question anybody asked was, "Was it safe?" And then: Can you walk on the streets after dark? Can you drink the water? Are people friendly? Does anybody speak English? Did you have cell phone service? Was the food good and the hotels up to standard? Of course. Buenos Aires is as forward-looking and modern as Los Angeles, with highways, new cars and Internet service. I can't deny that inflation and a weak economy haven't taken a toll on the city's infrastructure. It's not easy to find a sidewalk that isn't cracked or streets without potholes. But nobody notices and pretty soon you don't either.

Life here isn't about potholes and paychecks. It's about community. In every neighborhood we explored people were outside, strolling arm in arm, meeting for lunch, reading the newspaper in the coffee houses, walking their dogs and pushing kids on park swings. And there were plenty of tourists like me, snapping photos and window-shopping. Stopping for coffee in the upscale Recoleta neighborhood, we sat under a patio umbrella and watched the buskers entertain the crowd. While a clown played tango melodies on his accordion, a young couple swirled through a tango routine and onlookers dropped pesos in their hat. It was a foretaste of our next Buenos Aires adventure: dinner and the city's top-rated tango show. (To be continued.)

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