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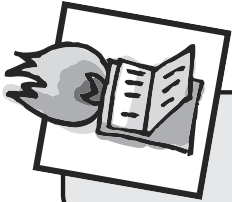
Argentina



Welcome to Argentina!

Very cold and very hot, very high and very low, ancient and modern, Argentina is a land of contrasts. It is the second largest country in South America and the largest in land mass among Spanish-speaking nations. After suffering a financial crisis in 2002 that almost ruined its economy, the country is moving forward again. While some things are changing rapidly, other things, fortunately, remain the same—like its natural beauty and rich cultural heritage!

After you have finished learning about Argentina, be sure to check out page 148 for additional classroom activities.



FAST FACTS

Official Name:	Argentine Republic
Location:	Southern South America, bordering the South Atlantic Ocean, between Chile and Uruguay
Population:	40,913,584 (2010 estimate)
Capital City:	Buenos Aires
Area:	1,068,302 square miles. Argentina is slightly less than three-tenths the size of the U.S.
Major Language:	Spanish (the official language) Italian, German, English, and French
Major Religion:	Christianity (predominantly Roman Catholic)
Currency:	The peso 1 peso = 100 centavos (cents)
Climate:	Mostly temperate. The climate ranges from tropical in the north to subpolar in the south. The hottest and coldest temperatures in South America have been recorded in Argentina.
The Land:	Rich plains of the Pampas in the northern half, stretching west to east; the flat to rolling plateaus of Patagonia in the south; the rugged Andes along the western border
Type of Government:	Federal presidential republic

Flag:		The Argentine flag has three equal horizontal bands of light blue (at the top), white, and light blue. Centered in the white band is a yellow sun with a human face called the Sun of May. The colors represent the clear skies and snow of the Andes. The sun's features are those of Inti, the Incan sun god. The sun commemorates the appearance of the sun through cloudy skies on May 25, 1810, during the first mass demonstration in favor of independence.
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Coat of Arms:

At the top is the Sun of May, which is also found on the Argentine flag. In the center of an ellipse are two shaking hands that come together in friendship, symbolizing the unity of the Argentine provinces. The hands hold a brown pike, which represents the willingness to defend the freedom symbolized by the red Phrygian cap (the traditional French liberty cap) on top of the pike. (In ancient Rome, slaves who had been given their freedom wore the Phrygian cap. These slaves were touched with a wooden pike by their owners before they were freed.) The background in the ellipse is blue on the top half and white on the bottom—the same colors that appear on the Argentine flag. The entire ellipse is surrounded by a laurel wreath, which is a classical symbol of triumph.

National Flower: Ceibo (Cockspur Coral Tree—a flowering tree)

National Animal: Cougar

Motto: “In union and freedom”

Natural Environment

Four Major Regions

Argentina is about 2,400 miles long and about 870 miles wide at its widest point. It lies in the Southern and the Western Hemispheres. Its natural environment makes it truly a land of contrasts, from its subtropical north to its subantarctic south. There are four major regions in the country, and each of them is different. These include:

- the Andes Mountains along the western border with Chile
- the northern plains and Andes foothills
- the central plains of the Pampas where most of the crops are grown
- the flat to rolling southern plateau of Patagonia (including Tierra del Fuego), which is rich in oil

The Andes

South America’s major landform is the rugged Andes Mountain Range along Argentina’s western border. The mountains are highest and widest in northern Argentina. The highest of these peaks is in Mendoza province at Cerro Aconcagua (22,841 feet above sea level). It is the highest mountain in the Western Hemisphere. Argentina’s lake district—a popular tourist center—is in the southern Andes.

In northwestern Argentina, rivers that began hundreds of years ago in the mountains have carved deep valleys down the eastern side of the Andes. There are salt lakes in many of the basins between the mountains.

Nothing grows in the highest elevations of the Andes, which reach 13,000 feet. Nevertheless, the mountains are home to llamas, *guanacos* and *vicuñas* (both relatives of the camel), alpacas, and the Andean Condor (the largest flying land bird in the Western Hemisphere). The mighty Andean Condor is an endangered species.

In central west Argentina is a mountainous area called Cuyo, which is known for its viticulture (growing grapes).

Northern Plains and Andes Foothills

The northern plains to the east of the Andes are part of a large lowland area that extends north into Bolivia, Paraguay, and Brazil. This region is composed of two subregions: the Gran Chaco (called the Chaco) and Mesopotamia.

The Chaco extends east from the foothills to the Paraná River. It's a woodland area composed largely of grassy savanna with subtropical forests and plants. Several rivers cross the Chaco; they cause flooding during the summer. Since the soil isn't good for farming, much of the Chaco is used for grazing.

Mesopotamia lies between the Paraná and Uruguay rivers. This is a humid lowland of rolling prairies. It rises to forest in the northeast where rivers rush over the great Paraná Plateau. As a result, this area is known for its spectacular waterfalls—particularly the Iguazu Falls on the border with Brazil.

In the warm and moist northeastern area of this region, you'll see many tropical plants such as the palm. The red *quebracho* provides extremely hard wood as well as tannin, an important ingredient in tanning leather. In the dry Andean regions of the northwest are many species of cacti.

In the north is Argentina's widest assortment of wildlife! Indigenous animals here include monkeys, jaguars, pumas, ocelots, anteaters, and tapirs. Birds include flamingos, parrots, and hummingbirds.

The Pampas

The humid Pampas (often called the Pampa) lie south of Chaco. These plains stretch west in a semicircle from Buenos Aires on the east coast for hundreds of miles.

You won't see many trees in the Pampa, except for some imported species like the eucalyptus and sycamore planted along the roads. But you'll find plenty of native grasses! You'll also find rich, deep, black soil that makes this region one of the best farming areas on earth. Thus, much of Argentina's farming and industry are in the Pampa, along with much of the population.



Pampa

The Pampa is also home to the legendary gauchos of the 18th century. These South American cowboys herded wild cattle and trained wild horses.

Patagonia

The lower part of Argentina that tapers to a point is composed of the rocky plateaus of Patagonia. They extend from low cliffs along the Atlantic coast to more than 5,000 feet at the base of the Andes in the west. The geography of this area includes canyons and valleys. The lowest point in the Western Hemisphere is Laguna del Carbón in Santa Cruz province at 344 feet below sea level.

Northern Patagonia ends in the lake district. Because of its rocky soil and fairly treeless land, people would have a hard time making a living in most of this area. So, few people live here.

Plant life in Patagonia consists of herbs, shrubs, and grasses. There are many fir, cypress, pine, and cedar trees in the Andes foothills. Wildlife here as well as in the Pampas includes armadillos, foxes, martens (a small animal related to the weasel), wildcats, hare, and deer. Birds include the American ostrich, hawks, falcons, herons, and partridges.

Major Rivers and Lakes

Most of Argentina's many rivers empty into the Atlantic Ocean. The Paraná (the largest) and Paraguay rivers join with the Uruguay near Buenos Aires. They form the Rio de la Plata River. This, in turn, forms part of the border between Argentina and Uruguay. The spectacular Iguazu Falls is on the Iguazu River, which is a tributary of the Paraná. Another important river is the Río Colorado, which forms the northern boundary of Patagonia.

The lake district in southern Argentina is a popular summer and winter tourist spot known for its many lakes, ever-green forests, and beautiful mountains and glaciers. The district extends from the Andes to Patagonia.

In northern Patagonia, the Nahuel Huapí Lake and the area surrounding it make up the Nahuel Huapí National Park. Lake Buenos Aires is shared with Chile.