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THE AMERICAS

80 TOP
CRUISE SHIPS
IN THE WORLD

TRUTH IN TRAVEL

FEBRUARY 2006

CARIBBEAN NOW!

BE ON THE SAND BY LUNCH

20 BEST BEACHES IN AMERICA

CANADA

A CULINARY ODYSSEY

PATAGONIA

LUXE LODGINGS, SPORTY SCENE

PLUS

HIDDEN CREDIT CARD FEES

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

U.S.A. \$4.50
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I

N THE 1930s,
ARGENTINA'S LAKE DISTRICT
ATTRACTED THE SMART SET,
ONLY TO FALL ON HARD TIMES.
MARK JOLLY TRACES
A REGION'S REBIRTH
THROUGH LUXURY LODGES
AND ECO-ADVENTURE

Making a splash:
Gauchos ride on Isla
Victoria, a twelve-
mile-long wooded
wilderness in the
middle of Lake Na-
huel Huapi. Horses
outnumber visitors
ten to one here.

L

LAO LLAO. SO NICE THEY NAMED

In the ensuing six decades, Llaol Llaol (pronounced

it twice. Argentina's construction to the north and out and roof Perched foothills

floating above Lake M bold, iconic diamond of had been freshly minted Park. Aided by a new rail opened up the area as a from Buenos Aires and beyond. But a year later, it burned to its foundation. Immediately, the undaunted architect set about re-creating the original structure, this time with a concrete facade replacing the timber. And the dream of luring travelers back to the gateway of the Great South was reborn.

"In the Austrian Alps you'll find this wonderful lake that meets a mountain, but then you'll look around and every fifty feet you'll see a fence and a little house," says half-Austrian, half-French Emmanuel Burgio, founder of Blue Parallel, an agency specializing in South America travel. "In Argentina, it's all wild, open space."

PLACES & PRICES

LAND O' LAKES Feel the urge to hike through a rain forest?

Hire a boat for a day-sail? Take a kayak out for a paddle? Get your gallop on courtesy of a sturdy steed? It's all doable in the Argentinian Lake District, a patch of Patagonia that includes lake idylls, a natural park, charming hostels, and the city of San Carlos de Bariloche. For details, see page 126.



to a large part, this perception is the reality. "In the Austrian Alps you'll find this wonderful lake that meets a mountain, but then you'll look around and every fifty feet you'll see a fence and a little house," says half-Austrian, half-French Emmanuel Burgio, founder of Blue Parallel, an agency specializing in South America travel. "In Argentina, it's all wild, open space."

Thanks largely to the financial crisis that four years ago shattered the economy of South America's most expensive nation and transformed it into a garage sale overnight, Bariloche has retooled itself into a top-flight destination. While hotel rates have started to creep north again and the five-star market has kept close parity with international tariffs, eating out—and eating well—are still a steal here. Bariloche's fearsomely First World infrastructure gives it an edge over its Latin neighbors. Moreover, the surrounding Lake District, where the provinces of Neuquén and Río Negro kiss the Chilean border, straddles three distinct climate zones and flaunts four full seasons of outdoor fun. No wonder a new wave of boutique properties, rebuilt historic lodges, and fresh-footed outfitters is ushering back Argentines and enticing outsiders to the ultimate lake and mountain resort in the Southern Cone, the nickname for the continent's southernmost countries.

To awake at dawn in the Design Suites near Bariloche is a bewildering experience. In that semi-conscious blur of opening my eyes and trying to make sense of the world anew, I am confronted with a wash of pinks and blues. I have swept back the curtains of my floor-to-ceiling windows to luxuriate in this moment, yet I am still trying to orient constituent parts of mountain, lake, and sky. I just can't seem to focus; the canvas is too big. Finally, I piece together the vista of Lake Nahuel Huapi. All I want to do is loll, but my host for the day, Diego Alolio, has other ideas. A couple of hours later, we're ascending Bariloche's highest range, the Cerro Catedral, by cable car. Come July, these slopes form Argentina's most happening ski scene, but now, in mid-March, as the colors of the southern summer bleed into autumn, we're practically alone. And damn, the panorama really is worth getting out of bed for.

Looking down from Refugio Lynch, we're able to appreciate the mighty (Text continues on page 101)

Map by Jiver Peadar