

JANUARY 10, 2011

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All rooms at El Casco Art Hotel in Bariloche afford views of Lake Nahuel Huapi.

Going Luxe in ARGENTINA

THE HIGH POINT of **Travel Agent's** trip through Argentina came, rather aptly, on the top of a mountain. It was in the Lake District town of Bariloche. I was strapped to a harness as I began taking baby steps to the edge of a 100-foot-tall rock and rappelling slowly to the bottom, knees shaking every inch of the way. I had arrived in the picturesque Bariloche from the bustling, vibrant Buenos Aires on a tour organized by **Blue Parallel** (www.blueparallel.com).

Blue Parallel is a bespoke travel boutique with the mission to "take discern-

ing travelers who are time-constrained to the most spectacular natural and cultural wonders of Latin America."

The operator/villa owner specializes in private, custom-made itineraries around the themes of World Heritage destinations, outdoor adventures, gourmet regional cuisines, exclusive lodging and insider access.

Although based in the U.S., it has an operations center in Buenos Aires. The company was founded in 2002 by Emmanuel Burgio, who previously worked in investment banking in New York City.

From Buenos Aires to Bariloche

We joined several other members of the travel press on a 10-hour, red-eye flight on **American Airlines** (www.aa.com) from New York's John F. Kennedy International Airport to Buenos Aires.

During our only day in the city, we were treated to lunch at the Park Hyatt Palacio Duhau before heading out on a short tour of Palermo, the busy tourist district of Buenos Aires. There is plenty to keep your clients engaged in the city, from its classic architecture to terrific restaurants and nightclubs, but if they only have a day like we did, a tour to Plaza de Mayo is a must. Here, they will see the Presidential Palace where Eva Peron gave her famous balcony speech.

The atelier of famous Argentine artist Ernesto Bertani in the San Cristobal neighborhood and the private art room of the Zurbaran Gallery also figured in our itinerary.

The following day, we took a three-hour flight to Bariloche in the Patagonia region of the country. It's roughly \$200 each way and more than worth the extra expense. There, we went on a mountain-bike tour of the

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FOR MORE on these great Argentina hotels and others, visit www.travelagentcentral.com/argentina/argentina-hotels.

Llao Llao peninsula and a kayak tour of Lake Nahuel Huapi before feasting on an incredible picnic lunch. That same morning, we met with another well-known local artist, Juan Lascano, at his studio, where he took us through his many superb nude paintings.

Another day, we took a private boat excursion on Lake Nahuel Huapi to Isla Victoria for an unforgettable hike and a delicious lunch. We drank some of the best red and white wines Argentina had to offer before proceeding to a private performance by a professional gaucho. The memory that will stick with me for a lifetime, however, is the rappelling.

All these activities and more can be arranged by Blue Parallel. Clients should be advised that there is a \$140 tax to enter the country. Credit cards are accepted and the fee is good for the next 10 years, so make sure they visit Argentina a few more times to get their money's worth.

Where We Stayed

In Buenos Aires we stayed at **Alvear Palace Hotel** (www.alvearpalace.com), which is usually the go-to hotel for presidents and other high-ranking officials. The hotel is splashed with

French designs, from the carpet of the hallways to the oversized chandeliers in the rooms.

Every floor in this luxury property has its own butler service. I stayed in room #723, which came with a king-size bed, views of the city, a flat-screen TV and free Wi-Fi. But the top touch was the small flat-screen TV on a wall above the bathtub in the bathroom. Your clients will thank you as they relax in the bathtub sipping some tasty Malbec and watching TV.

The hotel sits in one of the most elegant neighborhoods in the city, La Recoleta, with plenty of public parks and rich architecture. It is also home to some of Buenos Aires' top restaurants, coffee bars and stores.

Pitch this hotel to your affluent business or leisure clients. It's a great sell for both families and couples, but the ideal clients would be travel-savvy couples.

Agents should contact Revenue Manager Horacio Losa at 011-5411-4804-7777 or horacio.losa@alvear.com.ar for more information.

El Casco Art Hotel (www.hotel-elcasco.com) in Bariloche is an adventure traveler's dream. The highlight of this ultra-luxe hotel is the view; it overlooks Lake Nahuel Huapi, which

AGENTADVICE

When it comes to visiting Buenos Aires, "why not also go to Bariloche?" Asks Juan Carlos Rivero of **First In Service Tours** in New York. "Alvear Palace is one of Buenos Aires' most exquisite landmark hotels—the elegant ambiance is unparalleled. Sipping a glass of chilled Torrontes in the lobby bar is a wonderful way to begin or end a night out in the town."

can be seen from every room in the property. Each of the 33 rooms and suites is named after and themed on a famous artist.

I stayed in room #211, the Daniel Kaplan room, named after the famous Mar del Plata-based artist. It is one of the 18 Nahuel Studios in the hotel. Through my floor-to-ceiling window, I could see the lake with snow-covered mountains to the left and green hills to the right. It is decorated with Kaplan paintings and has brochures and books on the artist. You can even buy the pieces displayed in your room. (There are 475 works of art displayed in all in the property.)

The hotel has a beauty salon, fitness center, restaurant and bar. It is perfect for couples, and girls and guys getaways, although families may not be the right fit since children can't really appreciate the art on display.

Travel agents should contact Reservations Supervisor Carolina Freire (ventas@hotelelcasco.com; 011-5411-4815-6952) with queries.

The last property we stayed at was the **Villa Siete Lagos**, a private lakefront villa run by Blue Parallel. It has sweeping views of the lake and surrounding mountains. This classic, Patagonian-style villa packs in enough luxury amenities to make it a perfect all-season base to explore the Lake District. Contact Hallie Neumann (800-256-5307, ext. 309, hallie@blueparallel.com) for more information.

—JOE PIKE



The L'Orange restaurant at Alvear Palace Hotel in Buenos Aires is a popular meeting place.