

Getting Around

By

Buenos Aires Travel Guide

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The best way (by far) to get around Buenos Aires is the metro -- called the subte -- the fastest, cheapest way to travel from neighborhood to neighborhood. Buses are also convenient in Buenos Aires, though less commonly used by tourists. The advantage of getting lost on a bus is that you'll be able to see parts of the city obviously not visible from the underground that might help you orientate yourself.

In addition to the maps in this book, you can usually get maps of metro and bus lines from tourist offices and most hotels. (Ask for the QuickGuide Buenos Aires.) All metro stations should have maps too, though they're rarely in good supply.

You will also find that Buenos Aires is a great walking city. The beauty of the Buenos Aires streets will pull you further and further along, until you start to realize just how many hours have passed by since you began your stroll.

I've also included information about traveling by taxi and by car below.

By Metro -- Five subte lines connect commercial, tourist, and residential areas in the city Monday through Saturday from 5am to 11pm and Sunday and holidays from 8am to 10pm. The actual last train at any given station might be earlier, however, as the schedules are more of a guideline than a commitment. The flat fare is 70 centavos (23¢). You can also buy a subte pass for 7 pesos (\$2.30), valid for 10 subte trips. Since the passes are relatively cheap, demagnetize easily, and do not work well in intense humidity, which is most of the summer, you might want to consider buying extra cards as backup. See the inside back cover of this guide for a subte map. Although the subte is the fastest and cheapest way to travel in Buenos Aires, the system can be crowded during rush hour and unbearably hot in summer. After the subway has closed in the evening, it's best to take a taxi back to your hotel.

You should make sure to ride the A line, itself a tourist site, at least once during your stay in Buenos Aires. The A-line was the first line built, running along Avenida de Mayo, and it still uses the rickety but safe old wooden trains. Perú station in particular retains most of its turn-of-the-20th-century ornamentation, including advertising that mocks the old style from that time period and specially designed kiosks.

Neither the Recoleta nor Puerto Madero neighborhoods have subte access, but most of Puerto Madero can be reached via the L. N. Alem subte stop on the B line. (It's then a 5- to 20-min. walk, depending on which dock you're going to.) The D runs through Barrio Norte, which borders Recoleta, and depending on where exactly you're going, the area is a 5- to 10-minute walk away. Visit www.subte.com.ar for more information. The interactive site also gives estimated times and transfer information between stations.

Since the peso crisis, wildcat strikes on the subway have been common. However, the workers are usually very polite, often informing passengers ahead of time either by signs posted at the ticket windows or by telling them before passing the turnstiles. And they never leave trains stuck midroute in the tunnels during these stoppages.

By Bus -- There are 140 bus lines operating in Buenos Aires 24 hours a day. The minimum fare is 80 centavos (25¢), but this price goes up depending on distance traveled. Pay your fare inside the bus at an electronic ticket machine, which accepts coins only but will give change. Many bus drivers, provided you can communicate with them, will tell you the fare for your destination and help you with where to get off. The Guia T is a comprehensive guide to the buses, dividing the city up into various grids. You can buy the guide at bookstores, newspaper kiosks, or on the subte from peddlers. Bus lines generally run on the main boulevards. Look for the numbered routes on the poles, which list the main points and neighborhoods the bus will pass through. It's a good idea to take note of main plazas, intersections, and other landmarks that are near your hotel to help with finding your way back. Even hotels on quiet side streets are usually close to a bus route. However, since it can be easy to get lost on the city's buses, I don't recommend them as your main mode of transportation while in Buenos Aires.

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On Foot -- You'll probably find yourself walking more than you planned to in this pedestrian-friendly city. Most of the center is small enough to navigate by foot, and you can connect to adjacent neighborhoods by catching a bus or taxi or using the subte. Additionally, plazas and parks all over the city supply wonderful places to rest, catch your breath, and watch the locals. Based on the Spanish colonial plan, Buenos Aires is a wobbly grid fanning out from the Plaza de Mayo, which makes it unlikely that you'll get too lost.

By Taxi -- The streets of Buenos Aires are crawling with taxis, and fares are inexpensive, with an initial meter reading of 1.60 pesos (55¢) increasing 20 centavos (5¢) every 200m (656 ft.) or each minute. Remises and radio-taxis are much safer than street taxis. Most of what the average tourist needs to see in the city is accessible for a \$2-to-\$3 cab ride. Radio-taxis, when hailed on the street, can be recognized by the plastic light boxes on their rooftops. Ordinary taxis, more likely to be run by members of Buenos Aires's infamous taxi mafia, do not have these special lights. A rarely enforced law means taxi drivers can only stop if their passenger side is facing the curb. If you're being ignored by cabs with the red word LIBRE ("Available") flashing on their windshield, cross to the other side of the street and try hailing one from there.

Unlike European cities where taxi drivers go through extensive training to know their way around, Buenos Aires has no such training. Many taxi drivers here are from the provinces and simply do not know their way around Buenos Aires as well as they should. When heading to an off-the-beaten-path destination, or one along the miles-long avenidas, take note of the cross street when telling the driver where to go. Of course, it might be a fun learning venture for the both of you if you get lost. To request a taxi by phone (these drivers tend to be more experienced and safe), consider **Taxi Premium** (tel. **11/4374-6666**), which is used by the Four Seasons Hotel, or **Radio Taxi Blue** (tel. **11/4777-8888**), contracted by the Alvear Palace Hotel.

At the risk of sounding repetitive, I strongly recommend that if you need a taxi, you only take a remise or radio-taxi that has been called in advance. If you do take a taxi off the streets, only use those with plastic light boxes on their roofs, indicating that they are radio-taxis. There has been a sharp increase in the number of robberies by street taxi drivers since the economic crisis began. Remises are only marginally more expensive than taxis, but far safer. Most hotels have contracts with remise companies and will be happy to call one for you. You should also call for a cab from restaurants, museums, and so on.

By Car -- It's definitely not necessary to have a car in Buenos Aires, since public transportation is both cheap and easy. You'd be much better off hiring a remise or radio-taxi with the help of your hotel or travel agent. Though it is not recommended, if you must drive, international car-rental companies rent vehicles at both airports. Most hotels can also arrange car rentals.

Most drivers in Buenos Aires only marginally follow driving rules. The one rule that seems to be adhered to, however, is no right turn on red (one more characteristic that makes Buenos Aires the Argentine version of New York City). Argentine law also requires the use of seat belts. Driver's licenses issued by other countries are valid in greater Buenos Aires, but you need an Argentine or international license to drive in most other parts of the country. Fuel is expensive at about \$1 per liter (\$4 per gal.). A car that uses gasoil (as the name implies, a hybrid fuel of gas and oil) is the cheaper option fuel-wise, about 15% cheaper than regular unleaded gasoline. Many cars in Argentina also operate on natural gas. When refueling cars of this kind, you and all passengers will be required to get out of the car to protect you from the possibility of leaks or explosions.

The **Automóvil Club Argentino (ACA)**, Av. del Libertador 1850 (tel. **11/4802-6061**), has working arrangements with international automobile clubs. The ACA offers numerous services, including roadside assistance, road maps, hotel and camping information, and discounts for various tourist activities.

Car Rentals -- Many international car-rental companies operate in Argentina with offices at airports and in city centers. Here are the main offices in Buenos Aires for the following agencies: **Hertz**, Paraguay 1122 (tel. **800/654-3131** in the U.S. or 11/4816-8001 in Buenos Aires); **Avis**, Cerrito 1527 (tel. **800/230-4898** in the U.S. or 11/4300-8201 in Buenos Aires); **Dollar**, Marcelo T. de Alvear 523 (tel. **800/800-6000** in the U.S. or 11/4315-8800 in Buenos Aires); and **Thrifty**, Av. Leandro N. Alem 699 (tel. **800/847-4389** in the U.S. or 11/4315-0777 in Buenos Aires). Car rental is expensive in Argentina, with standard rates beginning at about \$90 per day for a subcompact with unlimited mileage (ask for any special promotions, especially on weekly rates). Check to see if your existing automobile insurance policy (or a credit card) covers insurance for car rentals; otherwise, purchasing insurance should run you an extra \$15 a day.