

Taking *the Reins*

From gauchos and mountain guides to chefs and winemakers, the women of Argentina have created luxurious travel experiences that welcome you into their community.

BY CHRISTINE CHITNIS



RIDING OUT FROM
LOS CHULENGOS
INTO THE FOOTHILLS
OF THE ANDES.

HORSEBACK RIDERS: COURTESY OF LOS CHULENGOS.

First, I have a confession. I've never been a horse girl, and no amount of riding has convinced me otherwise. That is, until I meet the Palma siblings, who run Estancia Los Chulengos, a historic ranch two hours southwest of Mendoza, Argentina, in the foothills of the Andes. Sisters

Ana and Manuela Palma are the image of gaucho chic, handling their horses with enviable confidence. With their tailored riding pants tucked into worn, handmade leather boots, and their perfectly crisp white linen shirts, they look like a Ralph Lauren ad come to life. If riding Pisco, the stubborn old gelding I was paired with, would give me even an ounce of their style, I was

prepared to gallop over the mountains and into the setting sun.

History runs deep here—the *estancia* has been in the Palma family for over 250 years—and the original bones of the property are still intact, although the interiors have been refurbished with artisanal touches like colorful woven textiles, cowhide and sheepskin rugs, and carved wooden furniture.

My trip here had an express purpose: With the help of Wild Terrains, a women-only small-group travel company, I had resolved to connect with the female creatives who are reshaping Argentina. From the buzzy capital city of Buenos Aires to the glaciers of Patagonia, the country tops many a traveler's bucket list. But lurking beneath the beauty is a pervasive culture of

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machismo and historically elevated rates of violence against women, coupled with political turmoil and economic hardship.

Yet history has also forged a spirit of innovation among Argentine women. In recent years, they've turned their collective talents to reimagining male-dominated spaces, including food, design, culture, and hospitality. "In the gaucho culture, men were in charge of chopping wood, saddling the horses, and working with the cattle," Manuela Palma explains. "Our parents raised us to do all of that—we've been riding horses since we were three years old, and driving a 4x4 up in the mountains. This gave us the freedom to develop our ideas and turn them into this business. It gave us the freedom to decide our own path."

Wild Terrains launched a 10-day Argentina itinerary to support women like the Palma sisters. "Every aspect highlights women-owned businesses, which allows our travelers to know exactly who their dollars are supporting and empowers local women who traditionally have been left out of the tourism industry," says Lauren Bates, founder of Wild Terrains. As a frequent solo traveler, I was grateful to be able to let my trip leader—the charming, personable Paige Nichols, who's called Buenos Aires home for the past 15 years—handle all the logistics.

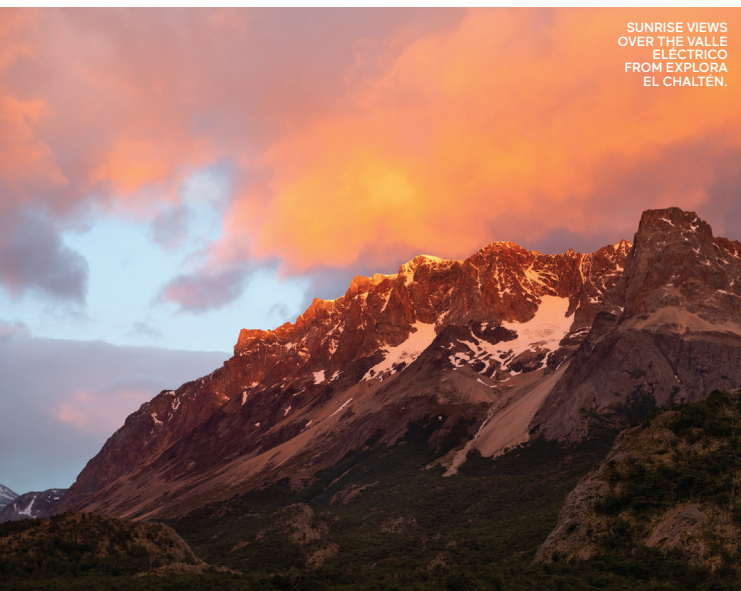
OUR ADVENTURE BEGAN IN MENDOZA, where a slew of recent openings, all spearheaded by women—sommelier Camila Cerezo Pawlak's restaurant Ruda Cocina, chef Patricia Courtois's 5 Suelos, Susana Balbo's luxurious SB Winemaker's House & Spa Suites—have positioned this long-lauded wine-growing region as the nation's new capital of gastronomy and hospitality. Sofia Pescarmona, CEO of Bodega Lagarde, welcomed us on our first night to her newest venture, Zonda, a garden-to-table dining experience where we enjoyed a regionally inspired tasting menu paired with Lagarde wines. I'd come to Mendoza expecting full-bodied Malbecs, and yet the female vintners I met were crafting juicy white, rosé, and sparkling wines using organic and regenerative agricultural practices. While sumptuous dining (and drinking) is the name of the game here, so too is pampering, and before heading to an overnight ranch adventure with the Palma siblings, we enjoyed a day of relaxation at our hotel, Entre Cielos, which is famous for its hammam.

Next, we took a quick flight to Buenos Aires, with its neo-classical architecture, tango-infused nightlife, leafy residential barrios, and red-hot restaurant scene. We crafted our

own leather purses at Nimes; embarked on historian María Casiraghi's feminist historical tour centered on Eva Perón; learned to perfectly fold the edges of an empanada with chef Toti Quesada; and enjoyed *puerta cerrada* (a private dinner) by Anafe's impressive young chef Mica Najmanovich.

Peeling off from the group, I flew three hours south to reach my final destination: Explora El Chaltén, a sleek, sustainably minded hotel set in the Los Huemules conservation reserve. From each vantage point the hotel offered, the vastness of Argentinean Patagonia was on full display—a remote landscape of towering mountains, glaciers, and pristine lakes. Although I tackled a 12-mile, mostly vertical hiking route, my feat couldn't compare to the backcountry adventures of Paula Alegre, an Explora guide and the first certified female high-mountain guide in the Argentinian Association of Mountain Guides. "Every year, I see more women mountain guides," she told me. "Still, the reality is that being a woman in this environment is difficult." Explora emphasizes women in leadership and purposefully seeks out female guides. Changes like these create opportunity in a field that has traditionally mistrusted women to handle the challenges of a harsh, unpredictable landscape.

When I began this trip, I had no doubt that the itinerary would be exceptional. But I couldn't have anticipated the connections that I made, both with the 10 other Wild Terrain travelers—a mix of independent, adventure-loving women—and with those I met along the way. It was a reminder of the power and impact women can have when they come together.



SUNRISE VIEWS
OVER THE VALLE
ELÉCTRICO
FROM EXPLORA
EL CHALTÉN.



A DINNER PARTY
FOR WILD TERRAINS
HOSTED BY SOFIA
PESCARMONA IN THE
LAGARDE VINEYARDS.



THE VINEYARD
LOFT AT ENTRE
CIELOS WINE
HOTEL OFFERS
ANDES VIEWS.

LAGARDE DINNER: LUCIA MONTI/WILD TERRAINS; REMAINING
IMAGES: CHRISTINE CHITNIS.

Seduced by Buenos Aires

Wondering where to find the best *women-owned hot spots* in Argentina's cosmopolitan capital? Wild Terrains trip leader and journalist Paige Nichols shows us the way.

BY CHRISTINE CHITNIS



NIMES



Stay

HOME HOTEL A tranquil oasis located in the Palermo Hollywood neighborhood, Home delights guests with its boutique charm, lush gardens, and sunny pool.

Eat

OLI CAFE This bustling Palermo Hollywood spot is run by next-level pastry maven Olivia Saal.

ANAFE Chef and co-owner Mica Najmanovich is helping to set new standards for the city's dining scene. Her iconic *paté con financier* is playful and rich—and cannot be missed.

PAIN ET VIN Featuring Argentina's most interesting wines and delicious small plates, this cozy wine bar, run by head sommelier Eleonora Jezzi and her Israeli chef husband, is an ideal spot to explore new labels and varietals under expert guidance.

Shop

CASA OZ Buenos Aires has a wealth of talented artisans and creators, and Casa Oz curates a delightful selection of handcrafted prints, jewelry, ceramics, and more.

NIMES Cofounded by Clara Bartolomé,

this chic accessories brand sources natural vegetable-tanned leather from the only sustainable tannery in Argentina. From purses and wallets to leather jackets and weekenders, Nimes is on everyone's wish list.

ZOU XOU Katherine Theobalds's vision when launching her shoe brand was to combine forward-thinking style and Argentine craftsmanship without sacrificing comfort. The result? Stylish mules, loafers, boots, and sandals that take busy women all over the city.

See and Do

MALBA Featuring the best of Latin American art, including works by Frida Kahlo and Tarsila do Amaral, the Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires is an essential stop. It also has a small but sublime gift shop.

RECOLETA CEMETERY Explore the opulent final resting places of Argentina's historic elite while searching for Eva Perón's tomb.

AVENIDA DEL LIBERTADOR Stroll amid verdant parks and stunning Belle Epoque mansions. Visit the Decorative Arts museum, sunbathe at the Floralis Genérica sculpture, or sip on an Aperol spritz at Caffè Tabac. One of the best ways to fall in love with the city is by simply walking around.



PAIN ET VIN