

# STUDENT REPORT: EXCHANGE TO BUENOS AIRES 2015 „EL BOLUDO EN LA JODA ARGENTINA“

## UNIVERSIDAD DE BUENOS AIRES – FACULTAD DE CIENCIAS ECONOMICAS

THIBAUT HORX (IBEB)

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Being admitted for my first choice for exchange in the beautiful capital of Argentina: Buenos Aires; the impatience to get to know the life on the other side of the ocean grew everyday I got closer to it. It's not possible to resume the extent of the experience I lived in the months from August 2015 until January 2016 in the length of this student report. But I will provide you with the most important information needed, for you to be able to enjoy your time there to the fullest and hopefully make you even more eager to start the adventure.

### **Preparation and Arrival:**

The first step is to be accepted for your exchange destination by the EUR and the second is to send your application to the Universidad de Buenos Aires (UBA) containing the following documents: motivation letter (similar to the one for exchange application just translated and more focused on Buenos Aires and the UBA itself), CV, official translation of grade transcript, letter of recommendation by one of your prior teachers, medical insurance for outside of Europe and a certificate of your Spanish level.

For the Spanish certificate, since I didn't have one when I was admitted for the exchange, I subscribed at the language centre „El Albanico“ close to Meent, with lovely teachers and effective classes. I did my B1.3 level there and send my certificate after the application at the end of June, without any problems. It is obviously advantageous to arrive with a certain facility in Spanish since most Argentinian don't or barely speak English, to be able to find your way and ask for information. The classes

and exams at the university are all taught in Spanish, which won't seem really easy at the beginning but you will get used to it quickly.

The contact person at the UBA is a woman called Alexia Pfaffendorf ([alexia@econ.uba.ar](mailto:alexia@econ.uba.ar): that you will also get to know once you arrived in BA) and can be contacted in English as well for any questions. She told me that B1.3 level is sufficient as long as I would take a language course there (which is very helpful to catch up with the Argentinian accent and correct your repeated mistakes in Spanish but not for free even though pretty cheap).

You will get a tourist VISA when entering the country (valid for 3 months) after which you will be guided through the different steps you have to do at "Migraciones" to get your student VISA (needed to validate your courses at the UBA). You can already bring the passport pictures you will need for that.

For your first nights in Buenos Aires, I can only recommend the hostel I spend my first week in called "Milhouse Hostel" with many international people, located in the city centre with plenty of activities to discover the city and parties organised by the hostel every second night, all that for a cheap price. You can choose if you want a shared or single room.

The first things to do is get a "SUBE" card (same as the OV-chipcard) at the closest kiosk or metro station and a prepaid SIM-card at Claro, Movistar or Personal. Both public transport and calling are really cheap. A great app for your phone to travel in the city by public transport is "ComoLlego Buenos Aires".

I was lucky to meet a guy who was on exchange with me and was looking for roommates for the apartment he just visited. Otherwise you have to follow the usual steps: writing mails on different websites or Facebook groups or ask other exchange students who are also looking for a place. Since the UBA is one of the universities starting the latest (mid-August) most of the student apartments are already taken. So if you manage to come already beginning of August with some time to accommodate yourself, you have better chances to find something. I would also suggest you to look for Spanish-speaking roommates, since it will help you progress way faster, force you not to stick to English and help you for daily issues: that's the goal of the whole exchange, isn't it?

Buenos Aires itself is really influenced by European culture in comparison to other regions of Argentina and South America.

As in every city, there are some “barrios” that are preferable to others, especially in a 14 million people metropolis.

First of all: Palermo: the Kralingen of Buenos Aires consists exclusively of student apartments, bars, restaurants for every taste and the best meat, shops and clubs (called “boliche” in Argentina). Then there is also Recoleta: probably one of the nicest and fanciest areas to live in, calm, with many parks and things to see (“El Cementario de Recoleta”) as well as restaurants and a shopping street and mall, but most importantly in walking distance to the Facultad de Ciencias Economicas. The faculties of the UBA are spread across the city but you will have all your courses in the economic faculty. The Microcentro is the city centre also in terms of important buildings (Casa Rosada, Congresso and Obelisco) but in my opinion, it’s harder to find a nice apartment there.

Even before arriving you will be added to a Facebook group with all the exchange students from the UBA, where you will be invited to the first social drinks, university and city tours and other activities. This can also be helpful to not arrive without knowing anyone. In any case, Argentinians are known to be open-minded and helpful if you need to ask anything.

## **University and Courses**

The hardest for me coming back from exchange was getting used again to the workload at the EUR. Not that you don’t have to study a lot for the midterms and exams there but the way of studying is totally different. First of all everything depends on which professor you choose, for whichever course you want to do, since they have different contents and exams. The easiest is to ask local students in the first days, which professors explain the best for exchange students and make the easier exams. I decided to choose courses related to the local economy to know more about the country, its history, its actual economic and social situation and their point of view on the world economy (definitely

interesting and different from the European point of view: more populist and socialist).

In most of the courses there are two midterms and if you obtain an average above 7/10 in both (quite common and doable) you are exempted of the final exam (end latest around the 10th of December). The „PASS“ grade is 4/10 and below that, you will have to do a reset 1 week after the midterm/exam. Since the last midterm is usually two weeks before the final exam, give your best to study for the midterms in order to be able to start your holidays and travelling earlier. Some other courses ask you to hand in written assignments but are all doable in my opinion.

During the classes, the teachers mostly talk 2 hours straight without breaks and without any slides, referring to the content of the book that you have to get, so keep focused to not lose the flow otherwise it's hard to get back to it (worst case ask notes to other students and try focus to listen, if you have problems doing both at the same time). The classes can go from 15 to 50 students more or less, depending of the course. I personally preferred the smaller groups with more interaction.

The great thing is that you can choose and change your courses to form a schedule, where you still have time to travel or organise road trips for a longer weekend.

For the ECTS I can't really tell you more since they don't use that system but convert it following to the number of hours you have each course per week. You have to pass a minimum of 3 courses to get your credits at the EUR. I took a fourth one in order to be on the safe side.

The faculty consists of an old and a new building, but it reminds me more of a huge school than the campus we have in Rotterdam, because of the small classes and old materials used, but it also has two lovely „patios“ to spend your breaks. In front of the faculty there is also a little park where you can spend the sunny hours.

## Finances

Important to know about Argentina is the yearly 40% inflation and the extremely volatile exchange rate. The best exchange rate I got on the black market was 18 Argentinian pesos for 1€ and went until 13,5 pesos just after the elections.

Since the new president Mauricio Macri, the decision was made to abolish the two different exchange rates (official and „blue“ rate) and thus the US\$ can be exchanged around 14,5/15 pesos pretty much everywhere. Best for that is Calle Florida where many „arbolitos“ will propose you „Change, Dollar, Reales,..“. You should always try negotiating or at least asking several of them for how much they change. It's important to bring a lot of cash in dollars or euros before your arrival since some rents can only be paid in those currencies and sometimes the exchange rate is still better on the black market. Paying in credit card and getting cash at the ATM was never an option for me since the importance between official and blue rate was so important (up to 80% more on the black market) but since the new president that seems to change now. However you can pick up dollars at the ATM in Uruguay (1/2 hours by boat) or make virtual transfers (I used [www.smallworldfs.com](http://www.smallworldfs.com) : trustworthy and mostly on time) if you're in need.

To get an idea about the price of a reasonable room in a shared flat or house in the earlier mentioned districts, you can count on a price between 250\$ and 350\$. Knowing the right people definitely helps you for the apartment search. The French agency managing our apartment is called MABA and might be helpful for your search and for money transfers as well.

The daily costs are cheaper than in Europe (transport, phone, drinks and food) but since you spend more time going and eating out, it amounts to a comparable budget. Other things as technology and clothes have comparable prices to Europe, sometimes even more expensive. I would count on a monthly expense budget of 500\$ to 600\$ including for road trips and small travels additional to the rent. In the end, you want to enjoy every day of this exchange to the fullest, without having to count your money every day.

Here is a list of basic costs:  
Restaurant meal with drinks: 4-8€ or groceries for dinner: 3-5€  
Phone costs for a month: 10€  
Public transport for a month: 15€  
Fitness for a month: 25€  
Club entry: 3-5€  
Beer at a Bar: 2€ for a litre  
Road trip to a city in Argentina with a bus or rented car for a week: 300€

## **Daily Life**

Buenos Aires is nothing compared to any big city in Europe. Even though the culture and architecture in the city is very influenced by Italian and European origins, the size is 3 times bigger than Paris for example. To get outside of the city you need at least one and a half hours by car. Everything is structured in “cuadras” (blocks like in the USA), which makes it easy for orientation. I was disappointed to know that the closest beach is 2 hours South of Buenos Aires, namely in Mar del Plata. But Tigre (one hour by public train) is also called “Little Venice” and definitely worth visiting and perfectly suitable for a weekend camping with friends.

However the diversity within the city is incredible and even after 5 months I feel like I still didn't discover the whole city.

I was warned upon arrival about the ways of Argentinians when it comes to money and that's definitely something to remember. Even though I wasn't witness of any bigger crimes and felt safe during my entire stay, you have to be aware of pick-pockets (in buses, trains, shopping streets or clubs) looking for easy-target tourists for phones or wallets. The best is to have a separate wallet without all your cards and not too much cash. The districts of San Telmo and La Boca are beautiful to visit during the day and showed me the truest “Argentinian” aspect of the city but are not advisable to visit at night. Don't show off too much with your fancy watch or new iPhone if you don't want to get mugged.

The daily Argentinian life is later with everything: lunch at 3PM, dinner starts around 10PM and you don't go out to a club before 2AM.

If you want to see the true emotions of Argentinians you need to play football with them at least once or go watch the biggest derby: River against Boca! Something you will never forget and nothing comparable to a match in Europe!

The downside from such a city is the 24hours of noise in the streets that you can only escape by travelling to discover the different parts of Argentina. I had the luck to travel around Argentina with my parents during the last 4 weeks of the exchange, from all the way to the South (Patagonia with its incredible glaciers) until all the way to the North to Salta (unbelievable nature and way more indigenous population) and Iguazu (must-see: worlds biggest waterfalls at the border to Brazil and Paraguay). I also organised road trips to Uruguay and Mendoza, which is known for its wine and the natural parks in the North of the city, with some exchange friends. To all of these destinations there are also trips organised by BAIS and Argentina for all, which is definitely recommended. These associations also organise other activities in Buenos Aires so check out their page for more information about happenings.

But I think finding interesting places to visit will be the least of your problems during your exchange.

If you still have any questions left, or want to hear more about the exciting stories that are waiting for you, let me know and feel free to contact me: [t.horx@t-online.de](mailto:t.horx@t-online.de) . We can also meet around campus to have a talk. I just couldn't include more of this experience in this short and didn't want to take away some surprises either.